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A. Alexander

TWO SERMONS

ON THE

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEATHEN:

WITH

AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING STRICTURES ON AN ARTICLE IN THE WESTMINSTER REVIEW, RELATIVE TO MAN'S ACCOUNTABLENESS FOR HIS BELIEF.

By RALPH WARDLAW, D. D.

GLASGOW:

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PREFACE.

THE following Discourses form a kind of Sequel to the two on Man's Responsibility for his Belief; and it is chiefly for the sake of such persons as may be in possession of the first Edition of these, that a separate impression of them has been printed. It is matter of regret, that this impression could not, without material inconvenience, be made of a corresponding size.

Though these Discourses are connected with the former, the former are by no means necessary to the clear understanding of their statements and reasonings; and the subject of them, considered in itself, is one of no trivial importance. If the subject of the former was interesting to the solicitudes of SELF-LOVE, the subject of these is not less so to those of PHILANTHROPY. If a Heathen could say, "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto,"*—is it possible for us to contemplate our fellow-immortals in the most important of all views of their condition, relations, and prospects, without any rising questions of anxious curiosity?—And as each subject has its appropriate, both have also their common grounds of interest. They both involve the principles of the Divine administration, as displayed under varying circumstances;—and both have thus a powerful claim on the attentive regard of PIETY, which cannot but be desirous to ascertain these principles with precision, to have a clear discernment and a devout impression of their rectitude, and thus to possess satisfactory ground on which to "vindicate the ways of God

* "I am a man,—whatever concerns man concerns me."

to men," and to clear the revelation he has given us of every evil surmise and derogatory imputation.—Upon this new topic I have endeavoured to bring the light of scripture to bear, and to show that the intimations of the Sacred Volume concerning it are in harmony with the dictates of enlightened reason. With what measure of success, it is not mine to decide.

I have very recently seen the advertisement and reviews of an Essay on the "Final State of the Heathen," by my esteemed friend the Rev. John Burder. But not having yet obtained the work itself, I am sorry I have not had it in my power to avail myself of a comparison of its views and reasonings with those which have presented themselves to my own mind.—I shall be glad if our sentiments shall be found coincident, and have no apprehension of any material discrepance.

For the sake of those who are in possession of the Discourses on Responsibility for Belief, I have subjoined, in an Appendix, some strictures on an article in the Westminster Review, relative to the topic there discussed;—an article, which, as well as some other anonymous comments on the principles of those Discourses, has served, instead of invalidating, to give them, in my own mind at least, additional stability.

R. W.

Glasgow, *March 22d*, 1827.

ON THE

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEATHEN.

SERMON I.

ROM. ii. 12, 16.

"*For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law;—in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*"

THERE is a subject, so closely connected with that of the discourses on man's responsibility for his belief that it may almost be regarded as a branch of it, on which very vague and unsettled conceptions are prevalent:—I mean the RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEATHEN,—that is, of those immense multitudes of our fellow-men who are not in possession of the written revelation of God. Their situation, I need not say, is very different from ours. What difference, then, does this produce on their accountableness? *For what* are they answerable,—and *on what grounds*? Must there be, in their case, a change in the principles of judgment; or an accommodation only of the same principles to the variation of circumstances?

Many of my hearers are aware, that there are few ob-

jections against the Bible more frequently to be heard from the lips of infidels,—uttered sometimes with serious gravity, and at other times with the lightness of a sarcastic sneer,—than that *it damns the heathen.* Do you really believe, it is asked, in the tone of mingled surprise, derision, and anger,—Do you really believe, that all the heathen are to be left to perish eternally, because they never have had the opportunity of knowing what you call the gospel? And to give point and force to the sceptical question, we are usually presented with the names of a number of individuals, selected from Grecian and Roman story, who are esteemed as having been, in their day, the most eminent for science, and patriotism, and general virtue.—The objection is the more insinuating, because it wears the garb of humanity, and recommends itself to the feelings of benevolence;—so that the heart, instead of being startled by it, (as it can hardly fail to be by some other objections, which the inward monitor is sensible cannot be entirely cleared from the charge of a predisposing corruption)—is rather apt to take to itself a kind of self-complacent credit for entertaining it. There is no such secret revolting from it as must accompany objections of the other description. It presents itself, indeed, not under the aspect of humanity merely, but under the no less imposing one of equity. The statement, that the Bible does damn the heathen, being assumed as true, without examination, and in its unqualified terms, it is pronounced, with a rising emotion of self-approval in uttering the sentence, to be unjust as well as merciless to suppose such a thing!

You may have heard this objection, my hearers:—some of you, it is not improbable, may even yourselves have made it.—May I entreat, then, your serious atten-

tion to the observations I am now about to offer upon this deeply interesting subject. I say your *serious* attention:—for neither as it respects God, nor as it respects man, is it a matter to be treated with levity. And if you are disposed to be at all reasonable,—not lying at the catch, and not presumptuously expecting more than finite creatures are entitled to expect, I hope to be able to satisfy your judgments at least, that the objection is destitute of any solid foundation.—As to the influence of this conviction upon your hearts and characters, I must leave that with God, praying that He may graciously keep you from resisting it!

In endeavouring to ascertain the ground which the word of God warrants us to occupy on this important subject, I would begin by putting the question to an infidel, What he would consider as a fair and equitable principle, on which Deity should proceed in judging and pronouncing sentence upon his creatures? Would he say, Certainly that they should be judged and sentenced, according to the circumstances in which they have respectively been placed,—the advantages, on the one hand, which they have enjoyed, and the disadvantages, on the other, under which they have laboured? in a word, that responsibility should be according to privilege? Would *this* be regarded by him as a fair and equitable principle of judicial determination?—If it would, (and it is not easy to imagine how any one should refuse or question it)—then we are prepared to show, that this is the very principle, not only recognized in a tacit and indirect way, but most explicitly laid down, and frequently repeated, in various connections, and in the simplest possible terms, in the Bible.

To come at once to the text of our discourse. I can

conceive to myself nothing plainer:—"As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law."

There are *two principles* distinctly and unequivocally recognised in these words, as the principles of Divine judgment.—The *first* is, that no human being, in any situation, under any variety of circumstances, shall "perish"—(that is, shall suffer future punishment in any of its various degrees)—except *for sin.* The perdition is associated with sin, and with sin only:—"as many as HAVE SINNED, shall PERISH." Every one, then, that does perish, perishes *on account of sin.*—The *second* is, that the *guilt of sin*, and consequently the *measure of its punishment*, will be estimated *according to the circumstances of those by whom it has been committed,*—according to their respective opportunities of knowledge both of duty itself and of the motives to the performance of it:—"as many as have SINNED WITHOUT LAW, shall PERISH WITHOUT LAW; and as many as have SINNED IN THE LAW, shall be JUDGED BY THE LAW."

Now, ought not this to be enough? If any are disposed to think that there should be no such thing as perdition or punishment *at all*, even on account of sin;—with such persons I have at present no argument. I must be allowed to assume it as a settled point in the Divine administration, that sin *ought* to be, and certainly *shall* be, visited with punishment. And supposing this assumed, the question is, can any reasonable objection be offered against either of the principles so clearly laid down in the text?

Nor is it in the text only that these principles are recognised. The spirit of them pervades the whole of the

sacred volume ; and in many places of it they are affirmed with no less explicitness than in the words before us. For example : Luke xii. 47, 48. " And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required ; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."—John ix. 39—41. " And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also ? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin : but now ye say, We see ; therefore your sin remaineth."—John xv. 22—24. " If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin : but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin : but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."—Matth. xi. 20—24. " Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell : for if the mighty works which

have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee."

From these and other passages, we lay it down, without hesitation, as the doctrine of scripture, as it is also the evident dictate of reason,—that responsibility is according to privilege,—that the punishment of offences by the judgment of a righteous God, will be exactly proportioned to the extent in which the means have been enjoyed of the knowledge both of duty and of the obligations to its performance.

The passages, as far as general principles are concerned, speak for themselves; and it is with general principles we have at present to do.—I pointed out, in a former discourse, the three requisites to responsibility which they evidently involve—namely, *capacity of understanding*, *opportunity of knowledge*, and *sufficiency of evidence*. I refer to what was then said on these points, without resuming the discussion of them. The additional principle now laid down is, that the *measure* of responsibility is the *degree* in which, in different cases, these three requisites actually exist.—A remark or two on one of the passages, on which no comment was formerly made, will set this in a clear light. It is Luke xii. 47, 48. The immediately preceding context sets forth largely and impressively the lesson, that *all* unfaithful servants shall be punished:—verses 42—46. "The Lord said," (in reply to a question of Peter) "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.

Of a truth I say unto you, That he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."—Having thus taught the general lesson, that all unfaithful servants are to be punished, he proceeds, in the verses before quoted, to *modify* the intimation, showing his disciples that though *all* are to be punished, all are not to be punished *alike;* and that the difference of treatment is to be proportioned to the means possessed by the defaulter of the knowledge of his Master's will:—"And that servant who knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

It may, moreover, be observed by the way, what a conclusive proof is thus afforded us, that the doctrine of *eternal* punishment is very far from being the doctrine of *equal* punishment. In what manner the infliction shall be variously proportioned to the guilt, it may be impossible for us to form any distinct conception: but it should be quite enough for us to be assured,—(and language could not give us a plainer assurance than this and other passages contain)—that such a proportion *there shall be.* Let no objection, therefore, to the scriptures be founded

on the contrary supposition; for it is a supposition which they unequivocally disavow.

The words of our text refer to the difference between the condition of the Gentiles and that of the Jews. The Jews had "the law,"—that is, the written law, or revelation of the Divine mind and will:—the Gentiles had it not. Were the Gentiles, then, to be judged according to a law which they were "without,"—which they did not at all possess? By no means. They were to be judged according to a light and a law which they actually enjoyed;—to the light of nature in the works of God around them, and to the law of nature in the dictates of conscience within them;—both at the same time (as we may show more fully afterwards) being taken in connection with traditionary revelation.—The Jews, on the contrary, having the law, and "sinning in the law," were to be "judged by the law;" that is, they were to be tried, sentenced, and punished, according to the terms of the Divine communications to them,—according to a clearer light, and a higher measure of obligation, than the Gentiles,—according to their privileges and advantages, and especially that most prominent and precious amongst them,—that "to them were committed the Oracles of God."—And is this not EQUITY?

If the Bible, my brethren, (as noticed in a former discourse) condemned men for their ignorance of what they never heard of,—for not receiving a revelation which they had no opportunity of knowing,—for not obeying a law which never was promulgated to them,—for failing to accept a message of mercy which never reached their ears;—the objection I am considering would be more than plausible; it would be valid,—it

would be insurmountable. It would be far more than difficult,—it would be utterly impossible, on any sound principles, "to vindicate the ways of God to men." The Book that contained such principles could not come from Him who is "a God of truth, and without iniquity."—But indeed it is not so. The representation is an impious slander on the Bible. No such principles of unrighteousness are any where to be found in it. And I would again put it to the conscience and the candour of any infidel, whether a fairer principle can be imagined than that which is laid down in the text and in the other passages that have been quoted? In conducting judgment on such a principle, does not the blessed God fully sustain the character which the same Book gives of him—"Just and right is He?" Sin he hates, and is determined to punish. He has published the determination. But he has, at the same time, assured us, that he will weigh in an even balance all extenuating as well as all aggravating circumstances, and pronounce his judicial sentences accordingly. —And what more than this can any reasonable man desire? So far from being a ground of objection and cavil, ought not the explicit recognition of such a principle, as the rule by which the Divine procedure is to be regulated, to recommend the Book which contains it, as giving just and worthy views of "the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness?"

Will you presume to say, that God should make all men equal in point of privilege?—Let me beseech you to be cautious. Forget not that you are creatures. Beware of incurring the guilt of "charging God foolishly." Beware of the presumption of dictating to the Most High; and of applying to his vast and complicated administration the line of your limited and short-sighted wisdom. Be-

ware of arguing in the face of plain and palpable facts; and of expecting what there is nothing analogous in the entire system of his providential arrangements to justify you in looking for.

You profess it may be, to believe in the principles of *natural religion*. I will not attempt to puzzle you, by asking the question, What is it?—though of those who are accustomed to use the phrase, there are not a few whom it might perhaps perplex somewhat more than they are aware to furnish an enumeration of its articles. What I now wish to press upon you is, that you would apply to natural religion, whatever you conceive it to be, the principle of your objection against revelation. You refuse revelation, because the privilege is not universal; because the God from whom it professes to come has not rendered all men in this respect alike,—placing them all on an equal footing. Now, have you considered whether your favourite natural religion be not liable to the same objection? It is true, that everywhere there are manifestations of the being and perfections of God;—yet even these are, in different quarters of the globe, exceedingly various, both in kind, and number, and magnitude; and where, moreover, are the two individuals to be found, whom the Author of their being has made perfectly alike in their powers of discernment, and their opportunities of discovery and knowledge? Amongst mankind in general, indeed, in different ages and countries, the diversities, as you cannot but be aware, have been exceedingly wide.—The truth is, that if you refuse to accept the blessing of revelation because it is not common to all, you act in opposition to the entire analogy of providence. If you would have any just pretensions to consistency, you should proceed on the same principle in regard to other

favours of heaven; for "what hast thou that thou hast not received? And who is it that hath made thee to differ?" And if you do proceed on this principle, where is the blessing which you can possibly accept?—for where is the blessing that is equally distributed to all? You should throw your wealth into the sea, because there are poor men in the world; you should put out your eyes, because there are blind men in the world; you should decline the use of your understanding, because there are idiots in the world.

I do not mean to say, that the difficulties to be solved in regard to the unequal distribution of providential bounties, are the same in *degree* with those which arise from the partial and limited circulation of the discoveries of Divine truth. But they are the same in *kind*. The principle of both is one: and the same principle must yield the same conclusions in reference to conduct. The course which it justifies in the one case, it must justify also in the other.—Neither do I mean to say, that the limited extent of the diffusion of Divine revelation is not *mysterious*. I readily grant it to be so. The mystery is one which I confess myself unable to fathom. It stands next, in my mind, to that of the entrance of sin itself into the universe of a good and holy God. But the darkness which envelops this part of the Divine procedure is the same in its nature, though denser and deeper in its shade, with that which invests the whole administration of providence in the distribution of good and evil. Nor is the difficulty at all such as to discredit the scriptures as a revelation from God, or to disprove their heavenly origin, in despite of this obvious analogy of providence, and of all the accumulated and diversified evidences by which their authority and claims are ascertained.

Do mankind, allow me to ask, possess any *claim* upon God for the benefits of that knowledge which revelation unfolds? We cannot admit that they do. When he bestows this revelation upon any, he bestows a free favour: when he withholds it, he withholds what he was under no obligation to bestow. He might have withheld it from all, and withheld from all the Saviour whom it is its chief purpose to make known. He might have reversed the existing arrangement, withholding it from those on whom it has been bestowed, and bestowing it on those from whom it has been withheld.—Will any of you, then, be so self-sufficient and presumptuous, as to arraign the Sovereign of Heaven and Earth, and pass a sentence of condemnation upon his conduct, because he has not imparted to *all* a blessing to which *none* had a claim?—Will you venture to affirm, that it is impossible for God to have acted in *this* instance, as the most superficial notice of his providential procedure must satisfy you he is daily and hourly acting, in every thing else? Will you thus make your notions of propriety the test of the Divine government,—sit in judgment on the counsels of that infinite Being, "of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things," and dogmatically determine what it is right or wrong for Deity to do? Will you

> "Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
> Rejudge his justice,—be the God of God?"

—Be sober-minded. Are you satisfied of the truth that God *can do no unrighteousness in judgment*? If you be, —can you not, with this conviction, leave the Heathen in the hands of "the Judge of all the earth?" Are you really afraid that he will do them wrong?—that they will not get justice at his hands? Is this the extent of

your confidence in the Ruler and Judge of all?—And *will* it, I must again ask you, be wrong that he does them, if he acts towards them on the principles of the text?—if he judges them, as he here declares he will do, according to the circumstances in which they have been placed? You cannot, you dare not say so. A principle more thoroughly equitable, your own minds are incapable of conceiving. *

Suppose there were no Bible,—no Book professing to be a revelation of the mind of God.—Would this produce any difference on the state and responsibility of the Heathen? Obviously not. The only difference which

* "Nor is there," says Bishop Butler, "in all this, (namely, "'the varieties and supposed disadvantages of some in comparison "of others, respecting religion,') any thing shocking, or which "would seem to bear hard upon the moral administration in "Nature, if we would really keep in mind that every one shall be "dealt equitably with; instead of forgetting this, or explaining it "away after it is acknowledged in words. All shadow of injustice, "and indeed all harsh appearances, in this various economy of "providence, would be lost, if we would keep in mind, that every "merciful allowance will be made, and no more be required of any "one, than what might have been equitably expected of him, from "the circumstances in which he was placed; and not what might "have been expected, had he been placed in other circumstances: "that is, in scripture language, that every man shall be '*accepted* "*according to what he had, not according to what he had not.*' This, "however, doth not by any means imply that all persons' condition "here is equally advantageous with respect to futurity. And "Providence's designing to place some in greater darkness with "respect to religious knowledge, is no more a reason why they "should not endeavour to get out of that darkness, and others to "bring them out of it; than why ignorant and slow people, in "matters of other knowledge, should not endeavour to learn, or "should not be instructed."—*Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature, Part II. chap.* vi.

would have arisen from God's imparting no revelation, would have been the multiplication of the number of Heathens. *All* must have been Heathens. You yourselves must have been Heathens. For what are Heathens, but men who are destitute of Divine revelation? On this supposition, then, let me ask you, could you yourselves, speaking calmly and reasonably, have wished for your own assize any other principle of judicial decision than that you should be judged *according to your circumstances?* And if this would have been a righteous principle in application to *all*, had all been in the same condition, is it not equally righteous, when applied to whatever proportion of mankind remain in that condition?—The Divine reasons for their being allowed so to remain, are beyond your province. They are among the "secret things which belong to the Lord." But here is something "revealed" which "belongs to us and to our children." It is the *principle of the Divine judgment.* And it is impossible that any thing could be more simple and satisfactory.

Let us, for a moment, set revelation aside, and, without adverting to the *cause* of the difference in knowledge between us and others, consider that difference simply as *a point of fact.* Whether that Book which we call by way of eminence THE BIBLE, be a revelation from God or not, it is matter of fact, whencesoever the information may be supposed to have come, that we are actually in possession of the knowledge of the only true God, in opposition to all the fooleries of polytheistic superstition. From whatever source, and by whatever channel, this superior knowledge has reached us, such, in the providence of God, is the indisputable *fact.* There *is* this difference between us and others.—Now, do infidels ever

think of rejecting or questioning this knowledge, on the simple ground that *all* do not possess it? If they admit at all the doctrine of a superintending providence, (and they might as well avow atheism at once if they do not) they cannot deny, that, in whatever way the difference has been brought about, it is GOD that has "made them to differ." Let them reject revelation, and impute the difference to other causes,—still it is a part of his arrangement:—it is as much *his* doing, in the sovereign counsels of his government, *as if* it had arisen from revelation. There is, therefore, the very same reasonableness in refusing the knowledge in the one case, because all do not actually possess it, as there is in the other. No matter, in this respect, whether they ascribe the difference to revelation or to natural reason; in either case, it is God's doing; and in either case the question presents itself, Why has not the Supreme Ruler given to all the same means of knowledge, and rendered these means in all cases alike efficacious? The *fact* of the difference exists;—it exists under an over-ruling providence, which *could* have produced universal equality;—here is knowledge which *we have*, and which *others want;* and, in whatever way it has come into our possession, there is the same responsibility for the use of it.

Be serious, my friends,—and be candid and impartial. Are the peculiar blessings of revelation the *only* description of blessings which infidels decline accepting, because they are not universal in their diffusion? If they be, then be assured, there must be some other reason by which they are influenced in the refusal of them, than the one they thus allege. There must be something which they do not like in the nature of the blessings themselves, or in the terms on which the bestowment of them is offered,

and their acceptance required. If other favours are received and enjoyed without the interference of any such scruple, can the suspicion which I have thus expressed be fairly considered as involving any breach of Christian charity? I leave the question to the decision of their own consciences.

I have thus endeavoured to show you the *principles*, according to which, the Scriptures assure us, the judgments of the Divine Tribunal are to be conducted. And I wish to impress it strongly on your minds, that beyond the *ascertaining of principles* it is not ours to go. We dare not attempt it. If you ask me to *apply* these principles, I am silent, and resolute in silence. This is beyond our legitimate province. It would be an arrogant and impious assumption of a prerogative exclusively divine. If you begin, therefore, to *name individuals*, and to press me with inquiries what is to become of *them*—I have but one reply:—You are going beyond your limits. You are not the judges. You know not enough of the cases and the characters,—not even of any one case or character,—to fit you for such decision. It is enough for you to be assured of the *principles of judgment*, and of the application of these principles being in the hands of an omniscient, unerring, independent, and impartial Judge. *There* you must leave all questions as to individuals. "The Judge of all the earth will do only that which is right." No one, you may surely rest satisfied, shall find any ground of complaint at the Tribunal of "the Holy One and the Just." Is the amount of your confidence in God (I again ask you) so very small, that you cannot trust him for this? —that you will not be satisfied with the explicit declaration of principles, but will insist on his disclosing to

you the results of their application to individual characters, or on his endowing you with omniscience, to enable you to make this application yourselves?

But a heavy load, I will suppose, after all that has been said, still presses upon your minds; you still urge the anxious inquiry—*But may not the Heathen be saved? Is their salvation, without the knowledge of revelation, impossible? Is there no hope for them?*

I have no wish to dismiss such questions lightly. It would show a want of all becoming sensibility, not to participate in the solicitude which they express. In attempting any reply to them, I must begin by inquiring, —What do you mean when you ask, "May not the heathen be saved?"—There is a vagueness in the question, of which, possibly you are not sensible.—When you say, May not the heathen be saved?—do you mean to ask whether *all* the heathen may be saved, whatever have been their principles, and whatever their character? I will not suppose you can mean this. It would be an insult to your good sense. The doctrine that would make salvation independent of present principles and present character in the case of the *heathen*, must of necessity, (if those who maintain it would be consistent with themselves) make salvation independent of principles and character as to *all mankind*. And with a doctrine such as this,—if any shall be found so foolish and so presumptuous as to entertain it,—we have at present nothing to do.

Again, then, I ask—Do you mean by the question, whether, if a heathen can be found, who has thought, and felt, and acted, fully up to the light which he has enjoyed,—who has in every thing lived agreeably to that light, whatever the measure of it may have been,—

whether *that* heathen may be saved?—then I answer, without the hesitation of a moment, YES—*most assuredly*. The text clearly implies it. We know that if those who *had* the law *kept the law perfectly*, then they would have been saved by it; for the scripture expressly saith, "The man that doeth these things shall live by them." Such persons would have been *sinless* in *their* circumstances;—and if any one of those who are "*without law*" were found *sinless* in *his* circumstances, *he* could not perish; for the text lays down the principle, that it is only *such as have sinned*, in whatever circumstances, that shall perish. It clearly follows, that if a heathen be found, who has, in all respects, lived according to the light he has enjoyed, he shall *not* perish. Point out the man, and we have divine authority for pronouncing him safe. The doctrine of the text is, that he is to be judged according to his circumstances,—"according to what he *hath*, and not according to what he *hath not*:"—in the case supposed, he comes up to this test:—he cannot, therefore, be condemned,—he cannot perish.

But there is still another question:—Even those who believe the gospel are not by the faith of it perfectly freed from sin; they are only delivered from its predominant power, from the love and the indulgence of it; so that, with various degrees of remaining corruption, *prevailing holiness* becomes their distinguishing character:—is your meaning, then, whether, if a heathen were to be found, understanding and believing those views of God which nature teaches,—humbly and seriously feeling their influence,—and living accordingly,—not a life, as in the former supposition, of *sinless* conformity to his principles, but, as in the case of the christian believer, a

life of such predominant goodness as the lessons which he actually has, the truths which he has learned from the volume of nature, are fitted to produce;—whether, if such a man were found, he might not be saved?—I freely answer, *I am not prepared to deny that he might.* And if any shall think these terms, in such a case, unduly cautious and measured,—I will go a step further, and say, the *spirit* of the text appears to imply, if its words do not directly express, a principle that would warrant our answering *this* question too in the *affirmative.*—Divine instruction is contained, if I may so express myself, *in two volumes,*—the volume of *nature,* and the volume of *revelation.* The text expressly declares,—what accords with the dictates of reason and with every natural sentiment of justice,—that they who are not in possession of the latter are not to be judged by it. If, therefore, any one can be found, who learns aright what is taught in *the only volume he has,* and who is rightly and habitually, though not perfectly, *influenced by what he learns,*—(for to insist on the *perfection* of such influence would, as I have just before noticed, be to require more than is required in the case of the believer of the lessons of the *other* volume, the volume of revelation)—I see not, in such a case, how either the spirit or the letter of my text could justify me in affirming his condemnation;—for then, in opposition to what the text so plainly teaches us, his sentence would proceed on the ground of his *not being influenced* by what he had *no opportunity to know.*

In granting, however, this general position, I must request the special attention of my hearers, to the following observations, as its necessary qualifying accompaniments:—

In the first place: I repeat, as of particular consequence to be borne in mind, I am only *laying down principles.* With the *personal application* of these principles I have nothing to do. That, as I have said, must rest in a higher quarter,—in the hands of the only competent Judge. In my present reasonings, all is hypothetical. *If* such a person is to be found, we may entertain good hopes of his future well-being.

Secondly: The supposition of such a person's salvation is not by any means to the exclusion, in the hypothetical case, of either the *influences of the Spirit of God,* or the *virtue of the Redeemer's atonement.*—With regard to the former; since both the volume of nature and the volume of revelation are divine, there is surely nothing either inconceivable or incongruous in the idea of the Holy Spirit operating on the minds of men by the truths contained in the one, as well as by those contained in the other. The truths indeed of the former volume are truths which are assumed and repeated in the latter,—although the principal lessons of the latter are discoveries peculiar to itself, beyond those of the former, and far transcending them in interest and glory. But still, the Spirit of God may, without the slightest inconsistency or disparagement, be conceived to impart his influence for giving the right discernment and the proper efficacy of those lessons that are *common* to nature and revelation, as well as of those which are *peculiar* to the latter. When the New Testament Dispensation is distinguished as the "ministration of the Spirit,"—and when such language is used as, "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified,"—we are not to understand, that there was *no Divine influence* previous to the fulness of time and the clear discoveries

of the gospel; but only that, under the gospel, the *degree* of that influence was to be so extraordinary and unprecedented, as to form a distinctive characteristic of the new era. Both the miraculous power and saving energy of the Spirit were in requisition from the beginning, for giving evidence and efficacy to the truth of God. But when Christ had finished his work,—when he "ascended on high leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men," the effusion was beyond all example abundant in its measure, and glorious in its effects.—On the same principle, when we speak of the Spirit operating by the truths of revelation, it might be meant, not that his operation was *exclusively* or *without exception* by their instrumentality, but only in a degree, and with a frequency so transcendently superior, as to be fairly and strikingly distinctive and characteristic. The truths taught by nature are also taught by revelation: and the question is, whether, as taught by nature, that is, by themselves, unconnected with the peculiar discoveries of the inspired volume, God has ever been pleased to honour them with the accompaniment of his Spirit, and so to make them the instrumental means of spiritual benefit to the souls of men. And on this question I would by no means venture to affirm any thing with confidence. Whilst the supposition involves nothing either impossible or unworthy of the Divine Agent,—yet it may be regarded as at least dubious in point of fact, whether the Spirit ever does make use of the truths taught by the light of nature alone, for renewing hearts, and bringing erring men back to God. When the apostle says,—"After that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe," his language certainly

favours the contrary supposition. It seems to intimate, that it was God's design, to give a full and fair trial to the unassisted powers of human reason. And the trial, during the whole period of it, and over all the extent of its field, having issued in a total failure, then he comes forward with his new instrument, the peculiar discoveries of the gospel, the doctrines of the cross. These he accompanies with his spiritual agency, and proves them to be, though foolishness in the eyes of the wise men of this world, "the power of God unto salvation."—Still, however, on the principles above mentioned, this and similar passages might signify not the *absolute exclusion*, but only the *very great rarity*, of divine influence accompanying the truths in the volume of nature. I do not think that inspired authority pronounces any unqualified decision of the question.

With regard again to the atonement of Christ, the question comes to be, whether there be any impossibility or contradiction in the supposition of its saving virtue extending to any who are necessarily ignorant of it? I hold it as a scriptural principle, in regard to our apostate world, that "there is *no salvation in any other*" than the revealed Mediator; and that all consequently who *are* finally saved must owe their salvation to his atonement and intercession. The whole countless multitude of the redeemed shall sing one song—"Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Personal worthiness, and self-salvation, will have no place in the thoughts of any one mind in that vast assembly. "CHRIST will be all, and in all." But the question is, whether the merits of Christ can, in any case, extend, in their saving virtue, beyond the actual knowledge of him? And in answer to this question,

the case of *infants* immediately presents itself. We believe the mediation of Christ to be available to *their* salvation, although they are incapable of knowing, understanding, and believing the divine testimony. There is a close parallelism between their case and that of the Heathen;—the sole difference being, that in the one the ignorance arises from *incapacity*, and in the other from *situation;* and these, where the situation is not the result of choice, are, in all that affects moral responsibility, evidently on a level.

Still, however, let it not be forgotten, all this is *hypothetical*. Of particular facts, or of the salvation of individuals, we can affirm nothing. We only say—*If—if* such persons *have* existed, or *do* exist.

I recur to the general position, that the *principle of judgment* laid down in the text is that of perfect unimpeachable equity, and repeat my appeal for this to the understanding and conscience of every hearer. If you are satisfied of the rectitude of the principle, leave the Heathen (for surely you may do so with confidence) in the hands of that Supreme Judge, who has announced this as the unalterable law of his procedure, and who, in its impartial application, will do none of his creatures wrong. Be thankful for the discovery of the principle, and intrust the application of it to him. To such confidence he is entitled. It is fearful impiety to withhold it.

Having offered these observations on the *principles of udgment*, which the Bible assures us are to be applied to the Heathen, I shall now enter a little into the *facts* of their case, and endeavour to show you what the doctrine of the same Book is, with regard to the light which they enjoy, the use they have made of that light in the dis-

covery of truth and duty, their actual character, and their true condition and prospects. Into this interesting subject the apostle Paul enters, with the comprehensive brevity and dignified authority of inspiration, in the latter half of the preceding chapter, and in the context of the words which form the subject of our present discourse: and I know not how I can accomplish my own end better, than by an expository illustration of his statements and reasonings;—subjoining such practical lessons as may be suggested by the entire discussion.—It is not my intention, however, to enter largely into the various topics, which are, either directly or collaterally, brought before us by the passages referred to; but to confine myself to such observations as bear more immediately on the subject of our present consideration—the *grounds of Heathen responsibility*.

In the reasoning which commences at the 18th verse of the first chapter, and is carried on to the 19th verse of the third, the apostle argues a point of a still more general nature than that with which we are at present engaged;—his object being to prove, as he states in chap. iii. 9. that "both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin." His proofs of this fundamental position, are drawn from a detail of *facts* in the history and character of both; and then the conclusion to which these conduct him is corroborated, for the conviction of the Jews—to show them that it was no new doctrine, but one explicitly recognized in their own scriptures—by an appeal to those scriptures of which they acknowledged the Divine authority. It is with that branch only of his proof which relates to the Gentiles, or Heathen, that we are at present concerned.

Having declared in the 16th and 17th verses of the preceding chapter, the reason why he was "not ashamed

of the gospel of Christ," namely, its being "the power of God unto salvation,"—adapted at once to the perfections and claims of Deity, and to the character and exigencies of human nature, and proving itself efficacious, when all the devices of man's wisdom had, after long and varied trial, turned out abortive and fruitless;—the apostle proceeds to show the grounds on which the necessity of this salvation rested:—"For the wrath of God," says he, (verse 18th,) "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

I dwell not on that fearful expression—"the wrath of God."—It is not a phrase without meaning—to which there exists no corresponding reality. The use of it in his own word assures us beyond controversy, that there *is* such a thing; for "it is impossible for God to lie,"—to convey false impressions to the minds of his creatures, or alarm them with groundless fears. There *is* such a thing; and in many parts of scripture it is represented as unspeakably awful. How, indeed, can it be otherwise? It is the wrath of a *holy* God, whose hatred of sin is infinite;—of a *just* God, who cannot but punish it according to its real demerit;—of an *omniscient* God, whose all-seeing eye no act, no word, no thought of evil can escape;—of an *almighty* God, whose power to punish no creature can resist;—of a *merciful* God, whose offered and slighted grace will at once aggravate and justify his vengeance;—and of an *immutable* God, whose hatred of sin can never cease to be infinite, whose righteousness no bribery can corrupt, whose knowledge no forgetfulness can impair, and whose power no lapse of time can weaken. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger!"

Of the displeasure of God against the sins of men, very

early intimations were given; and of these intimations, the remembrance was kept alive by the secret voice of conscience, by the infliction of threatened judgments and all the variety of human suffering, and by the institution of animal sacrifices, which appears to have taken place immediately after the fall, and which was subsequently established, in greater extent and variety, in the system of typical rites amongst the chosen people. In other nations of the world, this singular institution came to be miserably perverted from its true meaning and design;—and neither it, nor the admonitions of conscience, nor the traditional memory of original threatenings, nor the merited corrections of offended Heaven, were sufficient to withstand, or even in any considerable degree to check, the dreadful power of moral corruption, which hardened the hearts, and blinded the understandings of men.—"The times of this ignorance," says Paul before the Athenian Areopagus, "God winked at, but *now* commandeth all men every-where to repent." In the passage before us, he probably refers to the same period. "The wrath of God," of which from the beginning there had been intimations, "is *now* revealed,"—clearly and fully revealed, —"against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" —that is, against all their impiety towards God, and all their wickedness towards one another,—the violations, in heart and in conduct, of that love which is due, respectively, to both.

To the expression, "who hold the truth in unrighteousness," various senses have been affixed. On these it would be foreign to my purpose to comment, with the view of balancing their respective claims to preference. To myself it appears most naturally, and most consistently with the context and the general aim of the apostle's

reasoning, to signify, that under the influence of unrighteousness, they *restrained* or *held back* the truth (according to what seems to be the precise import of the original term) from exerting its proper influence. They laid it, as it were under arrest, because its imperative dictates were such as opposed the inclinations of their depraved hearts. It is not merely that they *kept the truth to themselves*—holding it in concealment and captivity, and instead of disclosing to others what they knew, criminally leaving them in error and delusion;—which some of the philosophers have justly been charged with doing, in regard to the unity and other attributes of the Divine nature:—but more generally, that both philosophers and others *refused to frame their lives, even according to such knowledge of truth as they actually possessed, or had the ready means of attaining.* They acted towards the truth, in voluntarily resisting its control, and shackling its freedom, as a foolish and unprincipled king does towards his best and wisest counsellor, when he throws him into prison, to have him out of the way, resenting his past fidelity, and determined no longer to be troubled with his salutary but unpalatable admonitions.*

* The phrase in the original is τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων. And in the sense which I have affixed to it, I find myself supported by several writers of eminence. The following explanations are substantially the same.

"*Who restrain the truth in unrighteousness*, when that heaven-born captive would exert its energy upon their minds, and urge them to obey its dictates."—*Doddridge.*

"Qui officium erga Deum et erga alios non neglexerunt solum, verum etiam qui veritatem et sensum officii, quod tum conscientia ex lumine rationis, tum scripta Mosis et prophetarum, tum imprimis doctrina evangelii clarissime docebat, extinguere sunt ausi, instar tyrannorum qui subditos injuste terrent, vincunt, atque opprimunt."—*Wetstein.*

This interpretation of the words is in evident harmony with the tenor of the subsequent reasoning:—verses 19, 20. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

It has been made a question by some, whether mankind would ever have arrived at any right notions of God, nay, whether they would ever have formed even the idea of his existence, from the works of creation alone, apart from original revelation. The inquiry is one which affords room for much ingenious speculation on both sides; but one, at the same time, which is incapable, I

"They are said to retain the truth in unrighteousness, by acting contrary to the notions of it they had or might have learned from the law of nature, and by suppressing or corrupting the dictates of their natural conscience."—*Whitby.*

"Who live not up to the light that God has given them:"—Who are not wholly without the truth, but yet do not follow what they have of it, but live contrary to that truth they do know, or neglect to know what they might. This is evident from the next words; and from the same reason of God's wrath being given, chap. ii. 8. in these words, "Who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness."—*Locke.*

To what Mr. Locke says about its agreement with the phraseology of chap. ii. 8. it may be added, that it corresponds equally well with that of the closing verse of chap. i. "Who knowing the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death; not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."—Views somewhat different are given by Schleusner, Wakefield, Calvin, M'Knight, and others. But none of them seem to me to accord so well with the context:—and I cannot but think those interpretations particularly exceptionable that confine the meaning to the *philosophers* of the Gentile world. It appears to me evidently more general in its intended application.

apprehend, of being satisfactorily determined;—because we have no certainly ascertained facts on the subject, nor indeed, from the nature of the case, ever can obtain them; there being no people, amongst whom the notions, whatever they may be that *do* exist, may not, in whole or in part, be the sadly corrupted remnants of primitive tradition.

I take it for granted, that the true knowledge of God was originally possessed by man; that when created, with a rational nature, for the enjoyment of happiness, and for the glory of his Maker, he was made acquainted with the existence, character, and will of that Being whose dependent and accountable creature he became. The supposition of the contrary is as inconsistent with sound reason, as it is with the explicit statements of revelation. And with this original knowledge the idea of subsequent tradition is inseparably associated; for, on no supposition short of the immediate extinction of the race, could the knowledge thus communicated, be totally lost at once.

To this *original knowledge*,—which, we learn with certainty from the sacred records, existed in the family of the second great progenitor of the human race, although not in the perfection in which it was possessed by man in innocence,—the apostle, I am inclined to think, refers in the nineteenth verse, when he says, "That which *may be known* of God is manifest in" (or among, or to) "them." Such is our English translation. But the expression in the Greek more literally signifies—"That which *was known* of God is manifest among them."* The intima-

* Τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ. I do not mean that τὸ γνωστὸν is not susceptible of the meaning "that which *may be* known;" for verbals of this description do sometimes correspond in signification to the Latin verbals in *-ilis*, denoting ability or capability:—but only that the

tions originally given of the invisible things of God have been continued before the very senses of men. Not only did God at first communicate the truth concerning himself directly to the human mind, but he also made it visible to every eye, in all the works of his hands, in every age, and in every country; not only did he write his name on the mind of his favoured creature, when he "made him a living soul," but he inscribed it in letters of light, on every part of creation. And when that creature apostatized, and became a rebel, he did not remove from before his eyes, or the eyes of his posterity, the traces, or rather the clear and numberless displays of his existence and perfections. On the contrary, the whole of surrounding nature continued to bear its silent but impressive testimony to the wise and good and mighty Creator. "The heavens still declared his glory," the earth, and sea, and air, were still "full of his riches." It was but opening the eye and the ear to the sights and sounds of nature,—and all was full of God.

The apostle, as I conceive, connects these two things

sense I have attached to it is its more direct and literal signification. "4. Τὸ γνωστὸν, cognitio, scientia, i. q. γνῶσις, quo ipso vocabulo usi sunt Chrysost. et Theodoret. explicationis causa ad locum, Rom. i. 19. διότι τὸ γνωστὸν τῶν Θεοῦ φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς, quanquam vero *habent cognitionem de Deo ab ipso Deo ipsis suppeditatam.*" *Schleusner.* —I do not say that by this last expression either Schleusner, or the fathers to whom he refers, meant the knowledge of God *originally imparted to man;* they might perhaps mean the knowledge (that is the lessons) taught in the works of his hands. I quote the passage only to show the proper meaning of γνωστὸν; which is certainly capable of being referred, and which, it seems to me, ought to be referred, to the knowledge of God actually communicated by original revelation, and subsequently continued as a lesson in all the clear manifestations of nature; but though originally possessed, afterwards awfully lost, all these continued manifestations notwithstanding.

together,—namely, *the possession of original knowledge*, and *the continued manifestation of the truth in the whole of creation:*—and it is from the two thus connected that he draws his conclusion,—"*So that they are without excuse.*"—When he affirms that "since the creation of the world the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, *are clearly seen, being understood* from the things that are made,"—he surely cannot be conceived to mean, that, in point of fact, these things have all along from the beginning been actually discerned and understood by mankind. This would be palpably inconsistent with truth, and contradictory to his own subsequent statements. The meaning is, that in the works of creation there have always been exhibited such proofs of the Divine existence and perfections as were amply sufficient for keeping men in mind of these important truths;—amply sufficient even by themselves, and still more so when taken in connection with original traditionary information, to be the basis of his condemnatory sentence.—And indeed, the two considerations, when thus taken together, do impart a special conclusiveness and energy to the inference:—"They are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

In these verses, the apostle states *matter of fact*, both with regard to the knowledge originally possessed, and with regard to the use made of it by mankind, or rather

their abuse, corruption, and loss of it.—Let us consider the facts of the case, that we may duly perceive the grounds of inexcusableness.

"*When they knew God, they glorified him not as God.*"—The words are sometimes explained, as if they meant merely that men *might have known* God,—that they possessed the means of knowing him, by the proper employment of their rational powers, in the contemplation of his wonderful works. But this is not their literal import, nor their full amount. Literally rendered, the words are,—"Because that, *knowing God*,* they glorified him not as God;" and they mean what they literally affirm, that men *really knew God*, having been originally acquainted with his existence and perfections, as well as subsequently reminded of what they knew by all the works of God around them.

Though they thus knew God, "they glorified him not as God." They did not continue to render to him the honour that was his due, to cherish towards him those devout tempers of mind which became his creatures, or to express the sentiments of devotion in worship befitting his nature and character.—They forgot his *unity*, and gave him not exclusive adoration;—they lost sight of his *spirituality*, and, instead of "worshipping him in spirit and in truth," imagined him to be gratified with what pleased the sensual appetites of corporeal beings;—the impression of his infinite though unseen *majesty*,—the majesty of eternity, immensity, omniscience and omnipotence,—being effaced from their minds, their homage was no longer that of "reverence and godly fear;"—and, letting slip the remembrance of his infinite

* Διοτι γνοντες τον Θεον.

and irreconcilable *separation from all evil*, they served the God of light with the works of darkness,—" the Holy One" with the mysteries of impurity.

" *Neither were they thankful.*" They felt not the obligations of gratitude for the multiplied favours of that God, whose goodness they originally knew, and who continued to load them with his benefits;—who " left not himself without witness, in that he did them good, giving them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." They ascribed not the praise of their unnumbered blessings where it was supremely due, but either took the credit to themselves, gave the honour to their fellow-creatures, or returned their thanks to gods, falsely so called; imaginary deities, the creation of their own deluded fancy.

Further:—" *They became vain in their imaginations*, and their foolish heart was darkened."

The word translated " *imaginations*," means more properly " *reasonings*."—The original knowledge was right; and all the results of human reasonings on the subject have been deteriorations of it,—departures from truth. Instead of there being in human nature, as philosophers insist, a tendency on this subject from ignorance to knowledge, the tendency has, in point of fact, been the very reverse,—a tendency from knowledge to ignorance,—from right to wrong. It was when men, having credited the devil's lie, vainly fancied that it had been verified, and that they had become " AS GOD, knowing good and evil;"—it was then that the proud " age of reason" commenced: and it was then, that " *professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*" Instead of attaining to increased illumination, " *their foolish heart was darkened.*" The

more they reasoned, in the lofty pride of independent wisdom, the further and the further did they depart from the purity and excellence of the knowledge that had been originally communicated to them; and the remark of an infidel writer was exemplified, that all is faultless as it comes from God, and all debased and corrupted as it passes through the hands of men. "The nearer," says a deservedly popular writer, "we approach to Noah, the nearer we invariably come to the pure and perfect character, the unperplexed knowledge, and the unblemished worship of Jehovah. The further we recede from this patriarch, the deeper we find ourselves regularly sinking in the abyss of polytheism. Were the unity and perfections of God inferred by reason from the works of creation and providence, this progress would of course be inverted. The traditionary state would be the state of obscurity, imperfection, and error, because then men reasoned less, and believed on authority more. As philosophy advanced, and investigations multiplied,—as the subject was more frequently taken up in form, and professedly discussed; the proofs of the unity and perfections of God would be accumulated, and the knowledge of this great subject rendered more clear, certain, and unobjectionable. The fact, however, has been uniformly contrary to this representation. As tradition has declined, this knowledge has declined with it. As it has been corrupted, the knowledge has been corrupted: where it has been lost, the knowledge has been also lost."*

In the midst of all their boasted wisdom, the folly of men quickly displayed itself in the views and practices

* Dwight's Theology, Serm. IV.

to which that wisdom gave rise:—"They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."—"They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more (or rather) than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."

I dwell not at present on the varieties of idolatrous worship—of human, and animal, and vegetable deities, which, in different ages and countries, have been the objects of the veneration of mankind;—the contemplation of which cannot fail to impress on every intelligent mind a sad and mortifying conviction of the weakness and infatuation of the understanding that gives itself up to such delusions; to awaken in every benevolent heart a lively emotion of pity for the victims of such wretched delusions; and to swell every pious bosom with an inexpressible feeling of mingled indignation and shame for the dishonour thus done to the incorruptible God.

"They changed the truth of God," says the apostle, "into a lie." They exchanged the true knowledge of God, which they originally possessed, for falsehood and vanity;—terms very often applied in scripture to *idolatry*,—of which all the varieties may be justly regarded as involving a tissue of lies against the perfections of the true God. "The number of the idols of heathen mythology is a lie against his unity;—their corporeal nature is a lie against his pure invisible spirituality;—their confined and local residence, a lie against his omnipresence and immensity;—their limited and subdivided departments of operation, a lie against his universal proprietorship and dominion;—their follies and weaknesses, a lie against his infinite wisdom;—their defects, and vices,

and crimes, a lie against his unsullied purity and perfection. The entire system, in all its diversity of modes, is a sacrilegious robbery of heaven,—an universal slander on the character of the Most High."*

The *responsibility* of the Heathen being our present subject, I forbear to enlarge on the description given by the apostle of idolatrous practices; and would only urge for a moment longer, the conclusiveness imparted by the union of original knowledge with subsequent manifestation to the inference which he draws, and which it is his object to establish—"*So that they are without excuse.*"

It is quite manifest, as I had occasion to show at large in the first of the two former discourses, that to render ignorance and error inexcusable, there must be possessed sufficient means of knowledge and grounds of conviction, and sufficient natural capacity of observation and understanding. The absence of either the one or the other of these, would be quite a sufficient apology for error and ignorance. Means of knowledge would be unavailing without natural capacity; and equally unavailing would be any measure of capacity, without means of knowledge. Both of these were fully possessed by men, when they lost the knowledge, and departed from the worship, of the true God.—Observe how the case actually stands. It is a much easier matter to *retain* a lesson, especially when the memory is aided by constant repetitions of the same truth, than it is to *learn* one; to keep what is known, than to search out what is unknown; to remember, than to discover. Now discovery was not what man had

* The Contemplation of Heathen Idolatry an Excitement to Missionary Zeal: a Sermon by the author before the London Missionary Society, 1818.

originally to effect. Many of the speculations of philosophy proceed upon the assumption that, originally in ignorance, he had all his acquaintance with the Divine existence and perfections to gather,—to reason out his knowledge,—to explore his way from darkness into light. But such speculations have no basis in fact. "However inexcusable men might have been had this been the case, —had they been left, by the use of the capacities bestowed upon them, to collect the necessary knowledge from the works of God around them;—yet this was not, in point of fact, their situation. All that was to be effected by the numberless displays of eternal power and godhead," was only to *keep them in remembrance* of what they already knew. Yet even with these advantages, "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." They did not "retain him in their knowledge;" but "changed the truth of God into a lie." They received at the first a lesson from God himself. They had this lesson written before their very eyes on every thing around them. Every thing in heaven above, and in the earth beneath, every part of animate and inanimate creation, repeated the truth to all their senses, had they but kept them open to observation. Yet they not only did not learn, but rejected or forgot what they had been taught; not only did not discover what was unknown, but lost what was known; and instead of being led by the creature to the Creator, put the creature in the Creator's place."

Surely in all this they were "without excuse."—To what cause are we to trace the mournful effect? It is not, as we have seen, to be accounted for from deficiency in the evidence of the truth, or from want of the means of knowledge; for both of these were possessed in the

most copious abundance:—neither can it be attributed to the want of natural capacity of observation and understanding; for on other subjects the powers of the human mind were most successfully exercised, evincing in many instances a perspicacity and a comprehensiveness, an acuteness of discrimination, a patience of research, and a power of discovery, that were creditable, and even wonderful.—The apostle, as I incidentally noticed in a former discourse, traces the effect of which I now speak, without hesitation, to a *moral cause*:—"They DID NOT LIKE," says he, (verse 28.) "TO RETAIN GOD IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE." On which words let the following observations be noticed:—

In the first place, they serve to confirm the explanation given of certain expressions in the preceding context, which we interpreted as importing that the true knowledge of God was originally possessed, and as having an immediate reference to that primeval knowledge. The words before us are in harmony with this interpretation: "they did not like to RETAIN God in their knowledge," being an expression which evidently assumes their previous acquaintance with his character. They *had* it, but did not *keep* it. They could not be supposed to *retain*, what it was their proper business to *discover*.

Secondly: That the loss of this knowledge is here ascribed to the pravity of moral principle,—to the want of right disposition,—to the alienation and enmity of the heart, is evident from *two* considerations. The first is, the word used by the apostle, rendered by our translators "they did not LIKE." The word has been variously translated by others:—"they did not *choose*,—they did not *approve*, they did not *think meet*,—to retain God in their knowledge." But the general idea conveyed is

much the same; there being evidently implied the charge of a wilful renunciation, and not a mere involuntary forgetfulness.—The second consideration is, the consequence that is represented as following: "*Forasmuch as* they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God *gave them over to a reprobate mind.*" Now, whatever difficulty there may be, in ascertaining the precise nature of this consequence—(a subject of inquiry into which it would be but remotely connected with my present purpose to enter,) it must be admitted by all to be something *judicial.* Now we are quite sure that nothing of this kind could be inflicted on account of mere *deficiency of intellect,* or for what we are accustomed to term *simple ignorance.* Such a deficiency, or such an ignorance, as can in any way incur the punitive visitation or the judicial abandonment of God, must be a deficiency or an ignorance that has its origin in a *moral cause.* It must be connected with the disposition, or state of the heart. The miserable votaries of idolatry are accordingly represented as "walking in the vanity of their minds, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness (or rather the *hardness* or *callousness**) of their hearts."

To this source,—to the influence of "the carnal mind," which is "enmity against God,"—the philosophy of the Bible, in opposition to all the self-flattering wisdom of man, teaches us to trace the whole system of pagan idolatry, in all its varieties. The philosophy of this world, to save from degradation its own favourite idol *human nature,* may fondly speculate on other causes; and a sentimental charity may listen to its speculations, and

* Πώρωσιν.

please itself with its conclusions, and try to show, with a self-complacent smile, how *very natural* some of the aberrations of Heathen idolatry are. But the Bible speaks a very different language. It calls things by their true names. It pronounces a woe on those who "call evil good, and good evil, who put darkness for light, and light for darkness." It lays no flattering unctions to the soul. It allows nothing to be *religion* but what has the true and only God for its object. Every thing else it denounces as irreligion and atheism. Idolaters, however sincerely and rigidly superstitious, it represents as living "*without God* in the world;" and proceeds on the assumption, that the nature to which any description of idolatry is natural, must be a nature in a state of depravity and estrangement from God.—Polytheism and idolatry have been errors of the heart more than of the head. The head, at least, has been the dupe of the heart. The folly has sprung from the depravity; the infatuation and blindness of the judgment from the corruption and alienation of the affections. The vail has not been upon the truth, nor upon its evidences and manifestations, but upon the hearts of the apostate children of men. The true character of God is such as depraved creatures cannot possibly *like*, or *choose*. In the hearts of such creatures, there is a predisposition to unbelief,—to the rejection of the truth, and the admission of error: and it is thus that mankind have all along discovered so lamentable a propensity to adopt any views of God but the right views, and, to embrace fancies pregnant with the most palpable absurdity, whilst they readily banished from their minds those original truths, which were uncongenial to the tendencies of their fallen nature, condemned their whole character, and allowed their consciences no repose.

An objection may here be plausibly started, in behalf of those of our race who have lived long subsequently to the communication and possession of the original revelation. If the possession of this at first be *included in the ground of inexcusableness*; what are we to say of the Heathen *now*, and for many ages since the tradition was actually lost? The inexcusableness may justly be predicated of the first generation of mankind, who had the original knowledge; but how can it be brought home to those who *have it not?*

To this question, it may be answered, *in the first place*, —The principle of reasoning, or inference, from an effect to a cause, and from design apparent in the effect to a designing cause, is one so very obvious and simple, notwithstanding all the abstruseness and mystery with which some philosophers have attempted to invest it,—and one of such incessant application, one on which men proceed, every day and every hour, with unhesitating confidence, and without the slightest feeling of difficulty,—that the question naturally and strongly forces itself upon our minds,—how comes it, that they do not apply this principle to the indications abounding around them of the existence, and of the power and wisdom and goodness, of the Supreme First Cause of all things? Why are they *not* led, and led universally, to the discovery, acknowledgment, and worship, of the almighty, all-wise, and all-bountiful Maker, Preserver, and Governor of the universe. It has been before admitted, that diversity in the powers of understanding is one of the considerations that will enter into the account in adjusting the measure of criminality; and that deficiency of knowledge will be found to infer guilt, only in as far as it has arisen from the disposition and state of the heart,—from the want of

inclination to examine, to receive, and to retain the truth. But such is the nature of the case,—such the simplicity of the general argument,—that we cannot entertain a doubt, that, were there a truly right disposition and state of heart, there would be no embarrassment or difficulty in perceiving the inference, and in tracing creation to its origin.—Although, therefore, it may be granted, that the guilt of those will be proportionally heavier who lived near the commencement of the world's existence, when original revelation was comparatively recent, and the stream of tradition had run but a short distance from its source, —who consequently enjoyed greater advantages, and, in their loss of the knowledge and departure from the worship of the One true God, gave the stronger indications of the perverting and blinding influence of an alienated heart;—yet neither will they be found guiltless, who, living further on in the world's history, have failed to discover Deity in his works, and to correct by the lessons of creation the errors and corruptions of tradition. For surely, were the existence of a *right heart* conceivable before the possession of the knowledge of that Being who must be the Object of its affections and desires,—there could be no such thing as "*feeling after him*" without "*finding him.*"

Secondly: In the experiments which have been made on human nature, a specimen, or exemplification, has been given of what is its *universal character.*—The chemist, in pursuing his investigations in metallurgy, can never subject to experiment all the silver and gold that are in the bowels of the earth. What then does he do? He applies his various tests and processes to *specimens* of each, selected so as to yield fair and impartial results; and from these results he draws his general conclusions,

as to the nature and properties of the respective metals. And the conclusions are perfectly legitimate. What holds with regard to gold in the specimen, holds with regard to all gold in the same circumstances. The crucible contains the mine. The beating out of a grain proves all that is in the earth to be malleable; the melting of a globule under the flame of the blow-pipe proves all to be fusible; the drawing out of an inch of wire proves all to be ductile.—Thus has it been with respect to human nature. In the loss of the originally imparted knowledge of God, and that in circumstances so peculiarly favourable to its retention, even in the midst of innumerable lessons of remembrance,—we have an exemplification of what the tendency of human nature is. It was an experiment. And the conclusion which the experiment yielded was established by a continued trial of four thousand years, during which that which had been lost was never recovered, but the result remained the same—"the world by wisdom knew not God." And, as if to leave no ground of doubt as to the fairness of the inference; in the midst of this protracted and diversified manifestation of human inability and corruption, another trial was introduced,—a second experiment instituted,—and the result obtained was the same. The *tendency to reject the truth when known* was made strikingly manifest in the case of the Jews. The only people who were in the right, discovered an incessant propensity to exchange the right for the wrong; whilst the nations of surrounding idolaters adhered pertinaciously to their errors. Jehovah complains of his favoured people, as he had just cause to do, in the following striking terms:—"Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of

Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing: Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit." And from all that we know of their history, we have very strong grounds for believing, that, but for the constant intervention of prophetic instructions and warnings, urged upon their attention by "line upon line, and precept upon precept," and of awakening miraculous attestations, and corrective judgments, the name and the worship of Jehovah would not long have continued among that people. They would have presented a second example of what took place originally, in the entire corruption and loss of the revelation committed to them, and in their merging again into the universal ignorance of polytheistic superstition and idolatry.

Now, from these experiments, we learn what human nature is. We have no reason to doubt that the same tendencies belong generically to it, that have been evinced in these particular cases, which include indeed a long period of time, and a great variety of trial:—and that, in all generations, had it been placed in the same circumstances, and left to itself, without divine interposition, it would have manifested these tendencies in the same way.

And if so, then the same evil principles, seen to exist by Him who "knoweth what is in man," infer of course the same guilt, and the same inexcusableness. "He seeth not as man seeth." The practical development of the principles is necessary to *our* perception of their existence: but it is not so with him. He knew the evils that were in human nature as well before the trial was made, as after. The trial has revealed them to us:—and the atheism of the human heart, the propensity of mankind

to live " without God in the world," has been established by indubitable proofs :—and not only the aborigines of our world,—and not only the seed of Abraham, but all mankind, in all places and in all generations, have shown themselves, in their ignorance of God, " without excuse."

Having made mention of the seed of Abraham, I am led to notice another consideration in regard to Heathen responsibility, which might, perhaps, with still greater propriety, have been introduced earlier. It is, that not only was there amongst mankind the tradition of original knowledge,—there was also in the world afterwards, for successive ages, *an existing revelation.* The Divine Being communicated the knowledge of his character and will, in a peculiar manner, to that Patriarch and his posterity ;—raising up amongst the race of Israel " holy men of God, who spoke as they were moved by his Holy Spirit," confirming the truth of their testimony by prophecies and miracles, and establishing the remembrance of it and of the prospects which it held forth, by the institution of an authoritative system of commemorative and typical worship. In the writings of Moses and the prophets, the ancient revelation was gradually completed,—forming those " Oracles of God," which were " committed" to that favoured people.—Now it was not for their own sake alone that they were thus favoured. They were blessed, that they might be a blessing. The lights of heaven were not kindled to shine for themselves. Neither was Divine truth communicated, to be confined to those who first received it. It was meant for diffusion. Israel was to be a kind of school for the nations. That people were to blame, when they made a monopoly of divinely imparted knowledge, prided themselves in it as their peculiar distinction, and were jealous of its going beyond their

own borders. And at the same time, those neighbouring nations were to blame, who heard of the name and wonderful works of the God of Israel, and were at no pains to avail themselves of the opportunities thus enjoyed of arriving at truth on the most important of all subjects. I might point out the connexion of Israel with the surrounding world, from the beginning of their history in the call of Abraham, down through its successive stages; and might illustrate it by a variety of instances, in which light did actually emanate from them, or in which it might have so emanated, had there been on their part the disposition to communicate, and on the part of others, the desire to receive. But such historical detail would detain us too long, and is not necessary to the establishment of our general principles. It is enough for my present purpose to observe, that those nations and individuals whose vicinity to Israel afforded them the readiest opportunities of acquaintance with the knowledge possessed by that people, and the evidences of its divine original, lay under an additional responsibility, besides that which arose from the light of reason. And there can be no doubt, that, had human nature been at all in a sound state, the nation that possessed the truth would have delighted in it themselves, and have embraced with benevolent joy every possible opportunity for its diffusion; and all around them would with grateful gladness have received it, and in their turn have promoted its circulation.—Of the amount of this description of responsibility, both as to existing opportunities, and the inclination to improve them, the Supreme Judge has a perfect knowledge; and he will bring it, as he will every thing else in which one man or one people can differ from another, into his final estimate of character and of guilt.

Such, then, has been the case of the Heathen, as it respects their means of knowledge, and the use they have made of them. Though without the written word, they have not been without sources of information. Had they been destitute of these, there could have been no ground of responsibility for their ignorance; and of that responsibility the measure must be, the extent of their means of knowledge. Even here, there are degrees. The natural manifestations of Deity are not every-where the same; the capacity for observation and inference, is not universally equal; and those who lived farthest back in the world's history, and nearest to the fountain of tradition, had more to answer for than those who came into being when tradition was corrupted or lost, and who were confined to the lessons of nature;—those lessons themselves, indeed, being, in some instances, perplexed rather than simplified, obscured rather than illustrated, by such tradition as remained,—if tradition it should at all be designated, between which and the original communication, there could be discerned no trace of resemblance; and the views and habits of idolatry, transmitted from preceding generations, proving hindrances rather than helps to the understanding of nature's instructions.

We shall leave the remainder of the discussion, and the general improvement of the whole, for a second discourse.

SERMON II.

In last discourse, I endeavoured to set before you the *principles of judgment*, according to which, the Scriptures uniformly and explicitly assure us, the judicial decisions of God relative to mankind in general, and especially to the Heathen, are to be formed and pronounced; and to demonstrate their thorough consistency with the most unimpeachable equity.—Having vindicated these principles, I proceeded to point out the leading facts of the case,—the circumstances in the history and condition of the Heathen world,—the variety and extent of their natural and traditionary opportunities of information,—on which the inexcusableness of their polytheistic ignorance and superstition is rested by the apostle.—Having made such observations as were deemed necessary on the *light* of nature, or their means of acquiring the knowledge of *truth;* it now remains for me to direct your attention to the *law* of nature, or their means of acquiring the knowledge of *duty*.

To this topic our attention is called by the verses that stand in immediate connexion with our text, though forming, as before noticed, a parenthesis:—verses 13—15.

(" For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.")

What is said in the thirteenth verse, (" For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified,") appears to have been designed, like the whole of the preceding part of the chapter, for the conviction of the impenitent and unbelieving Jews. They were " *hearers* of the law," but they were not *doers*. And yet they " rested in the law;" placing their infatuated confidence in that which condemned them; foolishly expecting safety and life in direct opposition to the very terms of that law on which they trusted, and in which they gloried.—In describing " the righteousness which is of the law," Moses had not said " The man that *heareth*," but " the man that *doeth* these things shall live by them;" and its condemnatory sentence was in harmony with its just and holy requirements— " Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." The law never did, and, from its very nature, never could, promise life, but upon condition of perfect practical obedience to all its precepts. And it was indeed passing strange, that these Jews should have " trusted in themselves that they were righteous," on account of the mere *hearing* of the law, the mere privilege of having it in their possession, whilst, instead of being *doers* of it, they were living in the flagrant and extensive violation of its

most express injunctions. It was an humbling manifestation of the deceitfulness of the heart, that they should have forgotten a principle so obvious as that *privilege increases responsibility*, and have relied for security on the very thing that was aggravating their condemnation.

But it is not to these "hearers," or possessors, of the law, that our present discussion immediately relates. It is to those who "*have not the law*,"—to the Gentiles, or Heathen, who are without the privilege of any written discovery of the divine will.—Of them it had just been said, "As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law." But "*Sinned without law!*"—how, it might be asked, could this be? how is it consistent with the sentiment expressed in two subsequent parts of this epistle, chap. iv. 15.—"Where no law is, there is no transgression:"—and chap. v. 13. "Sin is not imputed when there is no law?"—And by another of the inspired writers, sin is defined to be "the transgression of law," 1 John iii. 4.

These inquiries are answered, and the difficulty obviously involved in them satisfactorily explained, in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses:—"For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing, one another."—These words bring again clearly before us the ground of divine judgment against the Gentiles. They are without the *written* law; but they *have a law*. Had they no law at all, they could be chargeable with no sin, and subject to no just sentence of condemnation. But they have a law;—a law enforced

by all that is made known of God in his works and ways, and by all their daily experience of his unwearied goodness:—and it will be for the violation of the dictates of *this* law, that the sentence against them shall be pronounced in the judgment.

The supposition, it will be observed, is here made, of the Gentiles, although without the revealed or written law of God, "*doing by nature the things contained in the law.*" This, however, is not to be understood as meaning, either that they do *all* these things, or that the principles from which *any* of them are done are such as to render the performance truly good and acceptable in the sight of God. It is quite enough for the apostle's argument, that the Gentiles, in their conduct, evince a sense of right and wrong,—convictions in their minds of sin and duty. Now, that they have such convictions,—such an inward sense of right and wrong, is very manifest, when at any time they pay regard to the claims of humanity, of justice, of natural affection, and of general benevolence, in opposition to the influence of contrary principles.—When any amongst them, at any time, in any part of their conduct, show such regard, they make it apparent, that, although without the written law, they are "a law unto themselves,"—they "show the work of the law written in their hearts."—There the law of God was written originally,—"not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart." And although by the fall the impression of the divine hand-writing has been mournfully defaced and corrupted, yet it has never been entirely obliterated. In regard, indeed, to right dispositions of heart,—to the principles of godliness,—to true, spiritual, holy desires and affections, the obliteration is complete:—no trace of the original characters remains.

But the law itself has not been thoroughly erased from the mind, however entirely the heart may have lost the disposition to keep it. The erroneousness and debasement of the conceptions of moral good and evil prevalent among the heathen, have arisen from the very same cause to which the apostle traces their ignorance of God himself. The source of their dislike to "the only true God," was, the opposition of his pure and holy character to the pollutions of their fallen nature. And we need not surely wonder, that the same depravity should have produced, as far as the remaining light and power of reason would admit, the perversion and partial oblivion of that law which is "holy, and just, and good,"—condemning their trespasses,—"working wrath,"—and filling them with a "fearful looking-for of judgment." By all such voluntary erasement of the law of God from their hearts, deep guilt has been contracted. But still, the original impression, as I have said, is not gone. And while they wilfully act in opposition to the sense of right and wrong that is yet in their minds, they continue to "treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath." That in the general tenor of their conduct they act thus perversely, the apostle had formerly, in the strongest terms, affirmed;—when, after enumerating the abominations prevalent amongst them, he added,—"Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."—The judgment originally pronounced by God against sin, was DEATH. Of this original sentence, to which the apostle seems here to refer, tradition could not fail to keep alive some remembrance. And as, in the former case, respecting the existence and character of God,

tradition was powerfully aided by external manifestations; so in this case, tradition had the assistance, as we shall notice more fully immediately, of natural conscience, inspiring convictions of guilt, and apprehensions of its consequences. And while the sentence of death was thus engraven on the memories and consciences of sinful men, the early and singular institution of animal sacrifices, before adverted to, spoke the very same language, reminding the offerer, by a highly significant symbol, of his guilt and condemnation to death, while it at the same time directed his views and hopes to the promised atonement.

Men, therefore, originally knew, and ought to have kept in humble self-abasing remembrance, "the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death." Yet, instead of this, they chose to cast off all restraint. Instead of "striving against sin" from fear of the divine displeasure, they rather strove to rid their minds of every check to the commission of it; and pouring contempt on the threatenings of heaven, and stifling the foreboding apprehensions of their own minds, they not only practised those things which God had condemned, but delighted in all who would be their associates in rebellion and wickedness. This indeed is perfectly natural. Companions in iniquity give a man countenance and courage in his evil courses. A wicked man, when surrounded by the good, is surrounded with reproofs,—with hated monitors, who will not suffer his memory to forget, or his conscience to slumber. But when, in doing evil, he follows the multitude, his mind is kept comparatively easy; his fears are laughed away; memory and conscience are lulled into a dead sleep,—disturbed only by occasional starts, the starts of suspicion

and terror, agonizing, but transient, lasting no longer than while the fascinations of society and the intoxication of sinful pleasures are withdrawn; and the career of social vice, freed from restraints, and increasing in impetuosity and recklessness, hurries him along to the chambers of death.

There are two things particularized by the apostle, in proof of the existence and operation, although irregular and partial, of that sense of right and wrong which he ascribes to the Gentiles;—two things, by which they "show the work of the law written in their hearts."—These are, the manifest operation of *conscience* amongst them, and their mutual *reasonings* on the principles of morals, and the criminality or rectitude of human actions.

"*Their conscience also bearing witness.*"—As the conclusiveness of the apostle's argument does not at all depend on the peculiar *nature* of conscience,—being entirely unaffected by the questions which have been agitated on this point amongst metaphysicians and moral philosophers;—it is quite unnecessary for me to enter at large into such inquiries. It is enough, that conscience, whatever be its appropriate nature, and mode of operation, acts the part, according to the apostle, of a witness, bearing testimony within of evil and of good, condemning the one, and approving the other.—I may be allowed, however, one or two passing observations.

For my own part, then, I have often, in thinking of this subject, been at a loss to conceive what *conscience* can include in it, beyond the exercise of the *judgment* in the particular department of morals. Even those who speak of it as if it were something different, or something more, are at the same time accustomed to use language about it, that will hardly apply to it in

any other view. They employ the common phrases. They speak of the *decisions* of conscience;—of conscience being well or ill *informed;* and of these decisions being more or less *enlightened* and *just*, according to the information it possesses.—When we speak of the pain which an awakened conscience inflicts,—what more do we mean than the pain which arises from the conviction, brought home to the mind, of our having done wrong? The pain will be various in degree, according to the clearness and the force of this conviction; according to the apprehension which the mind has of the intrinsic evil of sin in general, and of the nature and circumstantial aggravations of the particular transgression. The consciousness of the wrong done is not the pain, but the cause of the pain. When the apostle Paul says, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world," he does not mean to identify the *testimony* and the *joy*, but, by a common mode of speech, to assign the one as the cause of the other. In the same way, it was the testimony of conscience in Felix,—it was the conviction, forced upon his judgment, of the enormity of his crimes, that made him "tremble" under the faithful warnings of the preacher of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." The consciousness was not the trembling, nor the fear which the trembling indicated; it was the cause of both.—We speak of *conscience slumbering;* and we oppose to this figurative phrase that of an *awakened conscience.* We mean by the former, that when the disposition to evil hurries on a person in a course of worldliness and vice, the mind is kept from thinking; reflection and anticipation are

alike repressed; there is no alarm, because there is no considerate thought; and this banishment of thought, which at first might require an effort and the use of various subsidiary means, becomes itself habitual by the influence of the progressive habit of evil-doing. The conscience again is wakened, when, by any alarming event, or powerful pleading, or whatever else may have the tendency to rouse, the mind is startled, and made to think; the claims of religion and virtue, of God and of the soul, are forced upon its notice; the infatuation and the damning tendency of sin, and the awful certainties of death and judgment and eternity, are, in spite of its natural and contracted unwillingness to think of them, pressed upon its view. And the vividness of the consequent emotions will correspond with the clearness of the mind's perceptions, and the strength of its convictions and impressions.—It must be obvious, however, that if in any one case the judgment is in danger of being perverted by the disposition or inclination,—of having its dictates biassed or silenced,—it is in matters of moral right and wrong; where duty presents itself under the aspect of the effort and pain of self-denial, and its opposite under that of the ease and pleasure of self-indulgence. It is thus that conscience is tampered with, and its remonstrances overcome. It discharges its function as a punisher of evil, much more efficiently than as a preventer; chastising by subsequent remorse, more frequently than it hinders by previous restraint.

But whether this simple view of the nature of conscience, as a modification of the judging faculty, or rather as that faculty itself exercised in a special department,—be correct or not, the argument of the apostle is not in the least affected by either its soundness or its

error.—Whatever view we take of it, and by whatever name we call it, its office is to bear inward testimony to the good or the evil of our thoughts, and words, and actions.

It is very true, as has often been remarked, that the practices of different nations seem to indicate a diversity in the dictates of this inward monitor; some actions being in one place held and treated as reprehensible, and even severely punishable, which in another incur no particular censure, nay are even approved and vindicated. The truth, however, appears to be, that conscience has partaken of the general depravity of man's nature; and in the exercise of that which is corrupt, affected too, as it necessarily must be, by an endless variety of modifying circumstances, we are not entitled to expect uniformity of operation. And besides this, it should be carefully noticed, that the diversities alluded to, in the views and practices of different peoples, do by no means, in every or perhaps in any case, with certainty establish the existence of a diversity in the natural intimations of conscience. It is very evident, that by various causes,—by views, for example, of present utility and temporary interest, or by the desire to press all possible aids into the service of a favourite object, and to remove obstructing difficulties out of the way of its attainment,—certain customs may come to prevail, in opposition to conscience;—and by conformity to these customs, when thus established, conscience may in time cease to be at all affected.—Is not the truth of this observation exemplified every day within our own experience and observation? Men are tempted to some sinful action by views of present pleasure or advantage. The temptation recurs, and the sin is repeated. The repetition

renders it familiar, gradually diminishing the check of self-reproach. Reason is perverted to support inclination, and to satisfy an uneasy mind. And, through the illusory influence of unsound and biassed arguments, that action may cease altogether to excite remorse, and may even come to be sanctioned and justified, which conscience at the first decidedly condemned.—Conscience is, in the passage before us, spoken of as " bearing witness." But it is a witness-bearer of little principle,—exposed, in many ways, to the influence of bribery and corruption, ever ready to give a false verdict, and to flatter men in the indulgence of their worldly and vicious inclinations. My own persuasion is, that the dictates of conscience amongst mankind are much more uniform than the discrepancies in human practice, although by no means of trifling magnitude, might, at first view, lead us to imagine:—and that these very discrepancies arise chiefly, if not even solely, from such varying conceptions of utility and present advantage as have just been noticed, influencing and overcoming this highly important, but, as belonging to a fallen nature, depraved and partial principle. These conceptions are diversified by situation, both among nations and in the breasts of individuals; and the operation of the principle which is thus variously and corruptly influenced naturally appears itself to vary, according to the variety of the corrupting cause.

While " their conscience bears witness," " *their reasonings among themselves accuse or vindicate.*"—Thus the latter part of the verse has with more strict correctness, been translated;*—the word rendered in our English Bibles *thoughts*, properly signifying *reason-*

* Καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων, ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων.

ings; and, when thus rendered, presenting a distinct additional evidence of that sense of right and wrong, that *inward law*, of which it is the apostle's object to prove the existence and operation:—whereas, if our ordinary translation is retained, it will not be very easy to distinguish between the "*thoughts*" and those *dictates of conscience* which he had already mentioned.

The "reasonings" of the Heathen concerning the principles of morals and of jurisprudence, and concerning the various personal and social virtues, clearly evince those convictions of good and evil in human conduct, of which the universal prevalence, although in various degrees of imperfection and corruption, is here affirmed.—The whole procedure of their courts of justice, (however rude, in some countries, these institutions may be) in trial, acquittal, condemnation, and punishment, is a farther manifestation of the same thing;—for beyond question, in these proceedings there is mixed with a regard to public utility the higher sentiment of moral approbation and disapprobation.—The writings of some of the Heathen philosophers, moreover, contain a very considerable portion of just and excellent moral precept;—and although it is mingled with much, and sometimes gross, error,—and, from their ignorance of the true God, is necessarily destitute of the life and soul of genuine morality,—yet those of their reasonings in which virtue is approved and vindicated, and vice exposed and condemned, are sufficiently illustrative of the truth of the apostle's representation, respecting "the work of the law written in their hearts."—Even the reasonings of transgressors, with the view of maintaining their characters, by clearing themselves of the imputation of crime, or by palliating and excusing their criminal conduct, proceed on the very

same principle, involving the admission of the sense of right and wrong, both in their own breasts and in the breasts of their fellow men, with whom they associate, and whose good opinion they are desirous to secure.

Such, then, is the case of the Heathen; such their means of information, as to *truth*, and as to *duty;* such the *light* and the *law* of nature.—The possession of these rendered them " without excuse" in their universal loss of the knowledge, and defection from the worship, of the living God, and in the endless variety of " abominable idolatries" into which they fell: and not less inexcusable were they, in the practical corruption of morals by which these idolatries were accompanied, and of which the apostle presents an enumeration so fearful in the close of the former chapter—ver. 28—32. " And forasmuch as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient: being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who, knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

To dwell minutely on the different features of this hideous picture, is as unnecessary, as it would be painful. It shows the deplorable length to which the corrupt affections of a reprobate mind will carry those who are given up to their fearful dominion. For alas! the por-

trait is not an imaginary one,—the aggravated caricature of a gloomy yet lively fancy. It is sketched by the pencil of truth;—it is drawn from the life. We are not, it is true, to suppose all the evils here enumerated to exist in individual characters;—except, indeed, in so far as that "enmity against God," which constitutes the very essence of human depravity, may be considered as summing them all up in itself,—as the latent germ of every possible evil. But the various wicked dispositions, impure desires, malignant passions, and unholy practices, which are included in this dark catalogue of evils, are not only to be found, but are common and prevalent, and have ever been so, amongst the idolatrous Heathen. —Even the gods themselves of the most enlightened nations have been not infrequently the patrons of the most infamous crimes, and have been worshipped with the most cruel and detestable rites, such as outrage every feeling of humanity and decency, and of which "it is a shame even to speak."—The distinctive characters of different nations may be various. Some of the features in the picture may appear with more or less of characteristic aggravation or diminution, according to particular circumstances. But of the *general state* of the Gentile world, at that time, and still, the outline here drawn, hideous as it is, is not overcharged, but faithful to nature and to fact.

Attempts, indeed, have been sometimes made to impose upon public credulity, by accounts of a widely different description from this. Representations the most fascinating have been drawn of the gentle manners and amiable virtues of particular tribes of the Heathen. Representations so fascinating, that we have been in danger of deluding ourselves into a persuasion of their reality

by the very pleasure which the perusal of them has imparted. We have yielded to the charm, and wished ourselves on the happy spot, which (but for the absence of God) has seemed like "paradise restored." But, whencesoever these descriptions have had their origin, —whether they have been the product of hasty and partial observation, united perhaps with a portion of sentimental enthusiasm, and of fondness for a pleasant picture and a wish to make a display of skill in the execution of it; or whether they have been, in part at least, the offspring of hostility to revelation, and a desire to impress the conviction on the public mind that natural religion answered all the purposes of human happiness quite as well,—that there might be as much, if not more, of unsophisticated simplicity, and real goodness of heart, under the teaching of nature and the prevalence of idolatry, as in nations called christian, under the influence of a higher and more refined faith:—whatever may have been the motives for their publication, subsequent visits to the same tribes have detected the imposture, have discovered the want of resemblance between the picture and the original, and established the truth of the apostle's description.

From all that has been said, it will be apparent, that when we speak of *Natural Religion* we use a phrase susceptible of very different meanings. The prevailing conceptions regarding it are, as I have formerly hinted, exceedingly vague and undefined; so that, while every man fancies he understands it, few are able to give a distinct or ready answer to the inquiry, What is it? or are at all sensible of any difficulty, till, by some such question, they are fairly led to apply their thoughts to the subject. It is obvious, that there are *two* inquiries respecting it, which

are, in a great degree, independent of each other. The first regards *the existence of evidence*,—the second, the *perception of that evidence by men*. It is not less obvious, that of these two inquiries the second resolves itself again into two. The evidence being supposed to exist—*Do men possess powers sufficient to qualify them for perceiving it?*—and secondly, supposing such powers possessed, *Has it actually been perceived by them?*—And then arises a *third* question—If, with these powers, they have *not* perceived it, *whence has arisen their ignorance?—to what cause is it to be ascribed?*

Natural Religion may accordingly be understood in two senses. It may either stand for those views of the "things of God" *which mankind have actually, without Divine revelation, attained to;*—or, for those truths which, whether men have actually discovered them without revelation or not, *are capable of being proved by sufficient natural arguments.*—Natural religion in the latter sense, and natural religion in the former, may be two very different things. In the latter sense, there is room for no small diversity of speculative opinion, with regard to the number and description of the articles of truth that should be comprehended under it. In the former sense, the whole history of mankind, comprising an immensely extensive induction of facts, irresistibly leads us to one conclusion, that natural religion consists in *ignorance of the true God*, and *polytheistic idolatry;*—the history presenting many a variety, but no exception. It is of essential consequence, that when the subject of natural religion is discussed, the difference between these two views of it should be borne in mind; since nothing can be more vain and illusory, than for a man, placed on the vantage ground of an existing revelation, to set

himself to demonstrate what nature teaches, and to leave it to be inferred that the lesson has been actually learned, —that the arguments have been perceived, and the conclusions deduced, and the obligations arising from them obeyed. The state of facts, as we have been largely showing, is fearfully the reverse of this. If from these facts we form our estimate of natural religion,—regarding it in its actual subsistence, and not in the speculations of theory,—our estimate must be very low indeed. Even in its "best estate," it is "altogether vanity." "The world by wisdom has not known God." The powers of the human mind have been vigorously and successfully employed in every other department of knowledge. There has been no deficiency of intellectual acuteness and energy in other investigations. But even the masters of science and philosophy have been but dark and feeble and perplexed conjecturers on the things of God. And, this being the fact, we are constrained to trace the ignorance and blindness to moral causes,—to the perverting influence of an alienated heart. And here lies the ground of Heathen responsibility. Their guilt may be lighter, by many degrees, than that of those who, enjoying the higher advantages of a written revelation, continue in a state of alienation from the truth of God, and rebellion against his will:—and of the guilt contracted by different nations, and by different individuals in each, the degrees may also be very various. But these it is not ours to determine. It belongs to Him who has the perfect knowledge of all circumstances, and of all minds. He alone is competent to fix the amounts of moral culpability, and to graduate a corresponding scale of punishments. If, from reason and from scripture, we can ascertain the great principles according to which the Divine judgment

are to be conducted; this (I cannot repeat too often) is all we have to do with. Further we cannot go, without trespassing on the province, and assuming the prerogatives, of Deity.

And with regard to these principles of judgment, I may simply recur to my former position,—that the one which is so explicitly laid down in the text, is that of the purest and most unimpeachable equity. I defy the most determined objector to devise a fairer.—Leave the Heathen, then, my friends, in the hands of that God, of whom you may surely be confident that he will DO THEM NO WRONG. And whilst, as becomes you, you are satisfied with principles, and leave their application with God, let me most affectionately and earnestly beseech you to "LOOK TO YOURSELVES." The general principle of the text is, that responsibility is according to privilege. Make but the supposition, then. IF—*if* you are really in possession of a communication from Deity, think seriously and maturely of the consequence. In these circumstances, the principle of our Lord's expostulation with those cities that had heard his words, and seen his works, and yet repented not, will be found, in all its emphasis, applicable to you. It will be more tolerable for the Heathen, who have been "without law," who have never heard of the Bible, or of the Saviour whom it reveals, than it will be for you, if, in the enjoyment of your superior privileges, you shall have lived "without God." The weight of your judgment, in the day of final decision, will be beyond calculation heavier.—Consider, then, the importance of inquiry;—of ascertaining whether the Holy Scriptures do indeed contain a revelation from God. Instead of vainly cavilling at the arrangements of Heaven in regard to *others*, be thankful for the special

kindness of Heaven to *yourselves:*—and, instead of attempting to unravel all the intricacies of the Divine procedure, and fretting because it is not given to you to sound those depths, which even the line of an Archangel's intellect may not be able to fathom,—leave it with the Supreme Judge to settle accounts with your fellow-creatures, who have been less favoured than you; and believe them secure from all unfair dealing at the bar of "the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness."

And surely, in the very state and character of the Heathen, you have a most affecting and convincing evidence of the necessity and value of a Divine revelation. The necessity very early appeared; and the whole of the subsequent history of the world continued, with increasing conclusiveness, to evince it.—And, while the contemplation of the difference between your condition and theirs calls for your gratitude and praise on your own account, it calls no less loudly for earnest prayer for them,—prayer, of which the sincerity must be testified by ardent and active zeal to communicate to them the enjoyment of the same privileges by which you are distinguished.—Whether God, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, ever, by his Holy Spirit, makes use of the truths taught by the light of nature, for the renovation of the hearts of men, we have been constrained to leave in uncertainty. But of one thing we are sufficiently sure, that such cases, if they have ever existed, have been exceedingly rare. The grand instrument of regeneration, as it is the only ground of acceptance, is "the word of the truth of the gospel." The Heathen are dying by thousands, in a state of entire ignorance of the remedy for human guilt provided by the God with whom they have to do, and in a state of utter unfitness for the only existing heaven. They have

" sinned," it is true, " without law," and they " perish without law:" but still they perish. And let us not fancy, that perdition, in any of its degrees, is a matter of light import, from which we need not be very much concerned about saving our fellow mortals. That can be no light matter, deliverance from which cost the blood of the Son of God. And whether we contemplate the effects which the knowledge of Divine revelation brings with it, in regard to this world, or in regard to that which is to come, true benevolence should not allow us to slacken our efforts in its diffusion, till " all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God."—Fancy not, that because they do not possess the privilege of revelation, they are in no danger. In no danger! whilst they are thus, under the influence of an infatuation that has a vitiated heart for its original and its continued cause, " changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things; and worshipping and serving the creature rather than the ever blessed Creator!" In no danger! while they are living " full of all unrighteousness," and realizing, in all its hideous features, that portraiture of depravity which we have just had before us! They *are* in danger; perishing in sinfulness and guilt, and unfitness for the kingdom of heaven. And we have in our possession that knowledge which, to them as well as to ourselves, is " life eternal;"—that " word of the Lord, of which the entrance gives light, and imparts understanding to the simple;"—that gospel which is " the power of God unto salvation," the divine method of pardoning mercy, the divine instrument of spiritual renovation. Are we then to keep this knowledge to ourselves? to make a selfish monopoly of our high

privileges? No, my brethren. We lie under a weighty responsibility. Possessing a treasure of inestimable preciousness, of which others are destitute,—we are bound by all the obligations of piety and of philanthropy to communicate it to others; and the more favourable our opportunities are for doing so, the more imperative becomes the duty, and the heavier the accountableness.

There is one objection against missions to the Heathen, which has sometimes been offered, and to which, as being immediately connected with the main subject of our present discussion, I may briefly advert. It is—that by sending the Gospel, or Divine revelation, to the Heathen, you *increase their responsibility, and their consequent guilt and danger, if they should not profit by your gift.*

Now, in reply to this objection, I would begin by at once admitting the fact. We *do* increase their responsibility. This is clearly implied in the principle which it has been our object to establish,—that responsibility is according to privilege—an increase of privilege bringing with it a proportionate increase of obligation.—But I should wish it to be considered, by those who make the objection, how far, if carried out to its legitimate consequences, it will necessarily lead them.—It will evidently apply, I do not say with the same force, but in the *spirit* and *principle* of it, to every blessing of which it is possible for us to have the enjoyment ourselves, in connection with the power of imparting it to others.

The possession of Divine revelation augments responsibility. Granted. But so also does knowledge in general; so does power; so does wealth; so does civilization, with its attendant benefits; so does superior mental capacity and genius;—so, in a word, does every thing in which it is possible for one human being, or one society of human

beings, to surpass another.—The parent who instructs his child, increases that child's responsibility:—are we then to withhold the precious boon of early education, and be careful to keep our families in universal ignorance?—The patriot, who enlarges the liberties and multiplies the blessings of his country, increases the responsibility of his countrymen:—are we therefore, instead of embalming his memory, and transmitting his name to the praises of future generations, to scowl upon him as an enemy, and load him with reproaches and maledictions?—The man who, by miracle or by skill, imparts sight to the blind, increases the responsibility of him who is the recipient of the benefit;—he gives him another sense which he may abuse, a new instrument to employ in the service of sin:—is the darkening film, then, to be left on the eye, and the delights and advantages of vision to be wilfully withheld, lest he who receives them should, ungratefully and perversely, aggravate his condemnation?—The gracious Redeemer of men, during his ministry on earth, scattered around him, wherever he went, in the benevolent exercise of his miraculous power, a varied profusion of temporal good:—the blind received their sight, the dumb spoke, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the sick were cured, the demoniacs were dispossessed. In all these cases, he laid an obligation on the subjects of his delivering power;—he increased their responsibility:—and are we therefore to believe, that he was all the while doing them harm rather than good, scattering curses amongst mankind instead of blessings?—Every favour that "cometh down from the Father of lights" increases the responsibility of him who receives it:—is it our duty, then, to pray that he may confer upon us none of his benefits, lest we should incur the guilt of abusing them?

—All this is obviously extravagant; and yet it appears to be no more than the legitimate application of the general principle, on which men would forbid our sending the message of Divine revelation to the Heathen, lest, by adding to their accountableness, we should be the means of aggravating their guilt.

I must go further. The principle of the objection, if fairly carried out, will land us in a charge of unkindness against the God of love himself, for having at all made and revealed such a scheme of mercy as the gospel contains. For certainly, if the objection be valid in the case of any particular people, it must have equal validity in application to the whole race. If *we* ought to refrain from sending the gospel to any nation, because by so doing we should increase their responsibility, and aggravate the condemnation of those who reject it; then will it inevitably follow, that God should have withheld the tidings of salvation from our apostate world, because wherever those tidings come the same consequence necessarily follows. If the tidings came *at all*, they must of course have come *to some:*—but, upon the principle of the present objection, the desirable distinction was the distinction of ignorance. Ignorance was bliss. And the extension of the knowledge,—since, wherever it came, it was heightening the responsibility and augmenting the possible guilt of men,—was but the extension of an evil, or, at best, of an uncertain and problematical benefit!—Thus, in the principle of this argument against missions to the Heathen, the procedure of Deity is implicated. We are brought to the strange and unnatural conclusion,—a conclusion, from which every mind will revolt that retains in it unquenched a single spark of reason or of generous sentiment, that the very offer of mercy is

unmerciful,—the presentation for acceptance of "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore" ungracious and cruel,—because those to whom the offer is made may be pleased, from pride and corruption, to refuse it! Men may reject the "counsel of the Most High;" and therefore they are justified in fretting against the Lord for having given it! —This will never do. The sole inquiry with us, should be—"Is it *in itself* a blessing? and is it the will of God, that this blessing should be imparted, by those who have it, to those who have it not? If we are satisfied that it is, let us act accordingly, and leave the result with God.

The general principle that *responsibility is according to privilege* may be further illustrated, and improved for our own practical benefit, by comparing together one or two other cases.

Take, for example, in the first place, the circumstances of the people of God in Old Testament times, in comparison with the privileges of those who lived at the period of Christ's advent, and in what the Apostle terms "the beginning of the gospel."—The Old Testament revelation was given by degrees,—"at sundry times, and in diverse manners." For a long period, it was not written, but traditionary; and, when committed to writing, it was comparatively obscure, the truth being, for wise ends, partially and gradually disclosed,—shadowed forth in types, veiled in prophetic imagery, and wrapt up in promissory intimations of a future age. That age commenced, when the Seed of the woman appeared; when "the Word was made flesh," and, having finished by his atoning death the work given him to do, ascended to the right hand of God, and poured out upon his servants the Spirit of a clear and full illumination. Then the darkness passed away, and the true

light shone forth.—"Blessed are your eyes," said Jesus himself to his disciples, "for they see, and your ears for they hear: for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." "God who at sundry times, and in diverse manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets," says an inspired apostle, "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son:"—and, having shown the superiority of this Divine Messenger to every human, angelic, and created nature, he adds—"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed unto the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip: for if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness by signs and wonders, and diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his will." * We enter not into any exposition of these passages. We only remark upon them, that they express, clearly and strongly, the enjoyment of superior advantages, as bringing along with it superior obligation, higher responsibility, and the danger of incurring heavier guilt.

Let us now, then, compare our own case with that of those who lived in the time of Christ and his apostles.—Here, in regard to the amount of responsibility, the balance may, at first view, appear in our favour. Our

* Matt. xiii. 16, 17. Heb. i. 1. ii. 1—4.

advantages may seem inferior, and our accountableness proportionably less. But a little reflection, perhaps, may throw more than doubt on the correctness of this estimate. It is true, we have not the privilege of hearing the discourses of him who "spake as never man spake," of seeing in his character the practical displays of perfect excellence, or of witnessing those "mighty works which testified of him that the Father had sent him." But we have before us recorded specimens of his heavenly wisdom :—we have the portraiture of his character, the very conception of which is superhuman, and still more so the inimitable consistency with which throughout it is supported:—and as to miracles, we have the Divine omnipotence for their *possibility*, the paramount importance of the occasion for their *likelihood*, and for their *certainty*, the evidence of such testimony,—so numerous, so disinterested, so consistent, and so severely tried,—so perfectly uniting in it every requisite to credibility, that to refuse it is to raze the very foundations of all human confidence. The evidence of a miracle to the truth which it was wrought to attest, remains, from the nature of the thing, invariably the same ; and as to the fact of the miracle having been wrought, the evidence of combined testimony may, in certain circumstances, be equal, if not even superior, to the evidence of individual sense. And, instead of the force of this evidence having decreased with the lapse of time, successive ages have produced in its support other proofs, which the very persons who performed the miracles announced for futurity in the form of *prophecies*. The fulfilment of these is a direct and accumulating evidence, both of the truth of the Book which contains them, and of the miracles ascribed to those who uttered them. The destruction of Jeru-

salem,—the present state of the Jews,—the progress of the gospel,—the rise, character, and dominion of the man of sin,—and other remarkable events, have borne their successive testimony to the truth of the apostolic records, and have thus successively raised the standard of modern accountableness. And to this a variety of other descriptions of evidence might be added, which have been also gathered by the advance of time; and amongst these not the least, the experiment which has been made of the efficacy of the gospel on the characters of men, by which it has been practically demonstrated to be "the power of God unto salvation." Contemplate it in its present career. Gamaliel spoke truth, when, looking at the nature of the new system, at the instruments and human means of its advancement, and at the difficulties with which it had to contend, he said—"If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." It has *not* come to nought; it has *not* been overthrown; and, considering what it has come through, its very existence at this day might be pleaded in evidence of its being from Heaven. Its *existence*, did I say? And is it now in a struggle for existence? No verily. Never was it more firmly established: never did it present a more imposing aspect of strength, or exhibit a fairer and surer promise of universality and permanence. It is rapidly pushing its way throughout the world; and wherever it comes, it is,—not by fire and sword, and the "carnal weapons" of human conquest, but by the force of truth alone,—overturning the altars of paganism, substituting for the polluted and merciless rites of idolatry the pure and benevolent service of the one true and living God, and

constraining men, under the influence of new principles, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly."—Our responsibility, then, is far from being on the wane. Time is multiplying and enforcing, not abridging and invalidating, evidence; and the condemnation of those who now reject the truth will not be less heavy than in "the beginning of the gospel."

We might apply the principle, further, to the case of young persons who enjoy the benefit of early religious tuition. Not a few such are now hearing me. You are favoured, my young friends, with a most important privilege. May you all be impressed with its true value, and disposed and enabled to make a right use of it!—for if you fail to do this, the blessing will, in *your* case also, be converted into a curse. It increases your responsibility; it will aggravate your condemnation. Compare your condition with that of children whom God has been pleased to bereave of the guides of their youth,—who have no parents. And compare it with the condition of those who have parents that care not for their souls,—that bring them up, not in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," but in ignorance of God, in worldliness, and in sin. Is there a young person now hearing me, who, at the mention of such, feels a rising envy?—a wish he were, like them, free from irksome restraint, and the constant iteration of truths, and precepts, and cautions, and serious warnings?—and left to pursue at liberty the "course of this world," and to take his indulgence in the "pleasures of sin?" Ah! my dear young friend, take care what you wish. God may grant your thoughtless desire. He may do so, by taking away those who now instruct and warn you, pray for you,

and watch and weep over you. You may thus get your wish;—you may be left to take your own way. But it is a way, be assured, of imminent peril,—of peril to *all*, —of imminent peril to *you*. It leads to perdition; and to a perdition, in your case, aggravated by neglected and abused privilege; of which the unceasing remembrance and unavailing regret will be as "the gall of asps within you." You will know the value of the blessing from the awful experience of the woe resulting from the misimprovement of it. It will be more tolerable, in the day of judgment, for the families of ungodly parents,—and for children that had no means of religious instruction, than for you. You must be "beaten with many stripes."

Finally; let all lay to heart the privileges they enjoy; not to rest, as the infatuated Jews did, in the mere possession of them,—but, with gratitude to him by whom they are bestowed, to make a right improvement of them. O never let the fancy delude your souls, that privilege is to save you. Nothing external can save you; —no connection with parentage,—no possession of the written word,—no observance of ordinances,—no providential distinctions;—nothing can save you, but an interest, by faith, in the righteousness and atonement of Jesus Christ, and, through him, in the riches of Divine mercy; —an interest, of which the reality must be evinced by a life of obedience to the Divine will, imitation of the Divine example, and active zeal for the Divine glory.— "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new."

APPENDIX.

In No. XI. of the *Westminster Review*, the first Article is a Critique on a Work entitled "Essays on the formation and publication of opinions, and other subjects." With a great deal of what that article contains, on the highly important subject of the *proper mode of dealing with evidence*, under the two heads of "Fulness of collection," and "Equality of reception," I perfectly agree. The statements indeed are such,—so obviously accordant with the reason of things, and the common sense of mankind,—as hardly to admit of any dispute. By whom the article was written, I have not even the slightest conjecture. But in the perusal of it, I could not divest myself of the impression, that there is in its pages a pretty frequent exhibition of commonplace truths, in a somewhat ostentatiously learned and logical style,—a parade of ecclesiastical and philosophical authorities, for what hardly required either names or proofs to support it,—and quite as great a degree at least of the pretension to metaphysical acumen, as of the reality.

The grand charge against me, in that part of the Critique in which, I have the honour to be introduced, is, that I have confounded two things which are essentially different, and attached to the one the consequences which belong to the other. The things thus alleged to be confounded

are, *belief* and the *mode of dealing with evidence.* The Reviewer considers the two propositions, that a man *is not responsible for his belief*, and that a man *is responsible for his mode of dealing with evidence*, as propositions alike indisputable:—so that, whilst belief can, in no case, incur culpability, in the mode of dealing with evidence it may be incurred, in all its shades, from the least to the greatest. And in the sense in which he sets forth these propositions, he is undoubtedly in the right.

But when we announce, or hear announced, the proposition that *man is responsible for his belief*, what reasonable person can ever fancy, that the responsibility affirmed has reference only to the simple intellectual conviction arising from the perception of evidence, exclusively of every thing in the man by which his perception of evidence might be influenced, and his belief ultimately determined? It is a self-evident truth, that when we speak of a man's responsibility for any thing whatever, it must be something connected with the operation of *moral principle.* With what is purely *corporeal* we cannot associate any idea of accountableness: and no more can we with what is purely *intellectual.* The latter, in regard to responsibility, stands on the very same footing with the former. When we speak then, as we freely and frequently do, of a man as responsible for any *manual act*, we do not of course mean the *act itself*, but the *motive* that prompted to it,—the *animus* that induced the perpetration of it. It is not the *hand* that is answerable, but the *mind*, as influenced by moral considerations. We include in our idea of responsibility every thing in the moral state of the principles and affections by which the external act (itself unsusceptible of any moral qualities) has been suggested and perpetrated. This is quite under-

stood; and he who should find fault with the language, and object that a mere external action could never be the subject of praise or blame, of desert or demerit, would justly be chargeable with hypercriticism and pedantry. Thus it is, in like manner, when we speak of a man's being responsible for his *belief*. We necessarily include *what leads to it*. Belief, considered simply as the immediate and necessary assent of the mind to the truth of a proposition on the perception of its evidence, is purely intellectual. Who ever thought of responsibility for this, considered in itself, abstractedly from every thing moral by which it has been influenced? To separate the two in this case, would be just as unreasonable, as, in estimating the amount of guilt in an outward action, to separate the action from its motive.

We are sometimes obliged, in considering the grounds of accountableness, to go even farther back than the immediate motive of the action. For example: our Saviour says to his apostles, in forewarning them of the evils they had to expect in the fulfilment of their commission,—"the time cometh when whosoever killeth you *will think that he doeth God service*," John x. 2. and of this we have an exemplification in Saul of Tarsus, who says respecting his own conduct as a persecutor,—"I verily thought with myself that *I ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," Acts xxvi. 9. Now the general position is a correct and universally admitted one, that *it is right for a man to act according to the dictates of his conscience*. Are we, then, by this principle shut up to the approval, or at least precluded from the condemnation of the violent and bloody deeds of such persecutors as were thus actuated by conscientious motives? We never hesitate to answer, No. But on

what ground does our answer rest? On the ground that their conscience was *ill-informed*, that they *ought* to have known better, and that the spirit or state of heart could not be really good, however plausible in appearance, from which a perversion of principle so monstrous had its origin. I adduce this case, for the purpose of showing, that, in our estimate of responsibility, we are accustomed, and indeed necessitated, to take in, not the action alone, but its motive,—and not even the immediate motive alone, but, if it be a mistaken one, the previous state of the moral feelings, with their modifying circumstances, by the influence of which the mistake has been produced. The same person accordingly who tells us that, when he was a ringleader in persecution, he acted from a conviction of conscience,—acknowledges himself afterwards to have been, while engaged in that course, "the chief of sinners:" and he makes this acknowledgment, because, when his eyes were opened to the true state of the case, he became sensible that "a deceived heart had turned him aside,"—that his moral principles had been perverted, and that under the false semblance of zeal for the divine glory there had been covered a deep-seated alienation from God, an aversion to truth, and a proud and heartless self-sufficiency.

The Reviewer represents me as "arraigning Mr. B. "for having declared in his Inaugural Discourse, that when "evidence is present to the human mind, belief is not a "voluntary, but a necessary consequence."—By evidence being *present to the human mind*, is here, of course, to be understood its being *discerned by the mind;* for according to the subsequent admission of the Reviewer himself, evidence, even the strongest and most conclusive, may be presented to the mind, and yet, from the power

of predisposing causes, its force and conclusiveness may not be at all perceived. Of the admitted doctrine, that belief must be according to the perception of evidence, he is pleased to say:—"The Rev. Dr. W. does, in this "case, what is so very apt to be done by a man who "does not like a certain proposition, and yet sees danger "in disavowing it: *he both attacks and maintains the "doctrine.*"—But this is not true.—The following sentences he quotes as my *affirmation* of it:—"I am far "from intending to question the soundness of the axiom "that belief must necessarily correspond with the per-"ception of evidence, it being in the nature of the thing "impossible that the mind should believe otherwise than "as evidence is or is not discerned. It is quite entitled "to the designation of an axiom, being a self-evident and "indisputable truth."—No admission," says the Critic, "could be more full and unequivocal."—Well: and where is my denial or "attack" of this principle? The Reviewer finds it in my attempt to prove that man *is responsible for his belief;* which position he conceives to involve a contradiction to the admitted axiom, that "it is "quite impossible for a man to believe or disbelieve "otherwise than as evidence is or is not discerned." If this be true, he says,—"then a man is not responsible "for his belief assuredly; for *it does not depend on him*, "*but on the evidence.*"—Now this is a little too fast.—It is *not* upon *the evidence*, obviously, that the belief depends; it is upon *the person's discernment of the evidence:* and his responsibility for his belief includes his responsibility for whatever in himself, of a moral nature, affects that discernment. This is the view of the matter given in the sentences of Sermon I. immediately following those quoted by the Reviewer as my admission that

belief must correspond to the perception of evidence:—"But this admission does not, in the smallest degree, "affect our conclusion as to moral responsibility; for "one very obvious reason,—that it is precisely on this "point, the perception of evidence, that the predisposing "causes are apt most powerfully to operate."

Here, then, we are brought to the main question. The doctrine which I have admitted as axiomatic, is, according to the Reviewer, the precise doctrine of Mr. B.'s offensive position. "What, then, is the quarrel "which he has with Mr. Brougham? *this, and nothing* "*but this being the truth which Mr. Brougham has pro-* "*mulgated?*"—The point which I have made it my object to establish is, according to him, something essentially different from this. "What, then, does the Divine "proceed to prove? That a man is responsible for his "*belief?* No; but for *a very different thing;* for his "*mode of dealing with evidence.*" Page 6.

Let us then consider, a little more closely, what the proposition is which, according to this writer, Mr. B. promulgates.—"The view," says he, "which the mind "takes of evidence, and its belief, are only two names "for one and the same thing. The feeling of the force "of evidence, and belief, are not two mental states; they "are one and the same state. A man regards a piece of "evidence as convincing: this is but another phrase for "saying he is convinced," p. 2.—From this statement it clearly follows, that when it is affirmed that a man is not responsible *for his belief*, it is the same thing as affirming that he is not responsible *for the view which he takes of evidence.* Now, the *impossibility* of a man's believing otherwise than according to the view which his mind takes of evidence is the ground on which it is con-

cluded that man cannot be *responsible* for his belief. The argument is—Man is not responsible for believing according to the view which his mind takes of evidence, because in the nature of the thing he *cannot* believe otherwise. But "the *view which the mind takes of evi-* "*dence*, and *its belief* are" according to this writer, "*one and the same thing.*" The proposition, therefore, that a man is not responsible for believing according to the view which his mind takes of evidence, identifies with the proposition that a man is not responsible for *believing as he believes!*

And is this really to be understood by us as the amount of the "GREAT TRUTH THAT HAS FINALLY "GONE FORTH TO ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!" —which Mr. Brougham emblazons in capitals, and holds forth with all the emphasis and exultation of a new and most important discovery! What kind of compliment does this critic pay to the master mind, whose powers I so heartily unite with him in admiring, when he represents him as giving all this pomp and prominence to so pitiful a truism!—And as for the reasoning of the critic himself, I may fairly retort upon him in his own language—"for what purpose does he put forth all his "strength, to establish a proposition, which no one in "the world ever called in question?"

"The Divine says, 'It is quite impossible that the "mind should believe otherwise than as evidence is or is "not discerned.' Then a man is not responsible for his "belief assuredly; *for it does not depend on him, but on* "*the evidence.*"—The reason, then, why a man is not responsible for his belief is here stated to be, that his belief "does not depend on himself, but on the evidence." I have already hinted, that this is a very vague and un-

guarded statement. It is clearly, as before observed, not upon the evidence, but upon the man's perception of the evidence, that his belief depends. If therefore it can further be shown, that in any respect *that perception depends upon himself*, then must he, on the admission of the Reviewer, in the degree in which it does so depend, be responsible for his belief. The Reviewer affirms "the "feeling of the force of evidence, and belief, to be one and "the same mental state." Surely, then, whatever, in the moral principles and dispositions of the man, tends to affect his "feeling of the force of evidence," makes that feeling depend upon himself; and in as far as it does so depend, he is virtually, in the very reason assigned for denying his responsibility, admitted to be responsible.— There thus appears to me to be a great deficiency of discriminative accuracy in the views and statements of this writer, notwithstanding the imposing style of metaphysical precision with which they are brought forward. He seems to have laid himself more open than the author whom he attacks, to the charge of maintaining and denying, without perceiving his inconsistency, the same doctrine.

He accuses me of having adopted a very unworthy procedure. "The quality of the line of conduct pur- "sued on this occasion," says he, "is as follows. The "odium which would be justly due to any attempt to "deny or explain away the criminality which may be in- "volved in dealing unfairly, negligently, or dishonestly, "with evidence, the Rev. Author endeavours to excite in "the highest possible degree. Having done his best to "excite this odium, he so frames his language as to at- "tach it to the proposition maintained by Mr. Brougham. "The proposition maintained by Mr. B. is a proposition

" undoubtedly true, as is affirmed by the Rev. Author " himself, and it is a proposition of the highest possible " importance, as all the world must allow. Yet the " Rev. Author does his best to attach odium to this " great and salutary truth, and to the man who lent the " aid of his great and powerful name to its dissemina- " tion," p. 5.

After what has already been said, I shall add nothing with regard to the importance of the " great and salutary truth" which, according to this writer, Mr. Brougham's proposition expresses, and which he himself, as we have seen, so felicitously shows to be a very unmeaning and a very harmless truism. But as to myself, he kindly subjoins to the above heavy charge of the greatest disingenuousness of which controversy can admit—" We are " perfectly satisfied, that Dr. Wardlaw has thus deeply " sinned in ignorance, and if he had not totally mistaken " the nature of his act, would have been one of the last " of men to have adopted so reprehensible a proceeding." —I am obliged to him for the alternative thus graciously given me on which to choose, between a *knave* and a *fool.* Of the two, were I really shut up to the choice, I am aware which I *ought* to prefer. But the point is one of delicate determination. I must leave it with my reader. There is a natural self-partiality which may be expected in such a case to influence a man's *belief;* that is while he is conscious of his not being a knave, to prevent him from *perceiving the evidence* of his being a fool. Whatever may be the predisposing cause, I confess I do not in the present instance *discern this evidence;* and I shall thus stand acquitted in the critic's mind of all responsibility for the sequence of my *not believing it,*—if a sequence it may be called, which he declares to be

"one and the same thing." I must be permitted to decline the kind apology offered for me, because I refuse the charge which it is meant to palliate.—I have done nothing else than what is done, in every other case of moral responsibility, by every ethical philosopher and casuist, by every divine, by every judge, by every barrister, by every man in common life,—I have considered belief, in the attempt to prove man responsible for it, as inclusive of the state of the mind and the affections by which it is influenced and determined; this being as necessary in regard to an intellectual exercise, as in regard to a corporeal act.—There is a paragraph further on in the article, which demands a few observations. I give it entire:—

"Dr. Wardlaw is prodigiously in earnest to convince "the world, that the scripture attaches the greatest merit "to faith, and the greatest demerit to the want of it. "We know not that so much effort on this subject was "necessary; but be that as it may, this at least is cer- "tain, that the scripture can inculcate nothing that is ab- "surd in point of reason, or mischievous in point of "morality. We have seen that it would be absurd in "point of reason, and mischievous in point of morality, "to ascribe merit or demerit to belief. This, therefore, "is what the scripture cannot do. We have seen that it "is most true in point of reason, and sound in point of "morality, to ascribe merit and demerit, even the high- "est, to the proper and improper modes of dealing with "evidence. The consequence is inevitable. It is not "belief which is called in the scripture faith, but the "proper mode of dealing with evidence. The man who "deals properly with evidence is the man who has faith: "the man who deals improperly with it is the man

" who is without faith. Now, it is possible, though " not very common, for a man to deal faithfully with " evidence, doing his utmost to have it fully before him " and to guard his mind from bias to either side, and yet " to come to the wrong conclusion. It is also very pos- " sible, and unhappily very common, that a man who has " never given himself any concern about evidence, and " who has never been without so determined a partiality " for one side, and antipathy to the other, as to exclude " even the approach to his mind of any evidence on the " side which he dislikes, should hold the right opinion. " Notwithstanding this, the former is the man who has " the merit of dealing virtuously, the latter is the man " who has the demerit of dealing wickedly, with evidence. " Here, the man who has the wrong opinion is the man " who has faith, according to the scripture; the man who " has the right opinion is the man who, be the opinion " what it may, is destitute of faith. Faith, in short, has " nothing to do with creeds. Of two men, the one even " an atheist, the other a sound believer, it may be, that " the atheist is the man who has faith, according to the " scripture; that the sound believer is the man who is " destitute of faith, according to the scripture; that the " atheist is possessed of all the merit, the sound believer " of all the demerit, which the scripture ascribes to the " possession or the want of that saving grace. As we " have shown, that, of all classes of men, the clergy, as a " class, are the most constant and the deepest offenders " against the virtue of dealing rightly with evidence, it " follows, that of all classes of men living, the clergy are " the most remarkably destitute of faith; in other words, " are, of all men living, the greatest of infidels."—Pages 20, 21.

I have read many things about faith. But this is one of the most extraordinary paragraphs that has ever fallen in my way. Surely the Old Roman would have been confirmed by it in the truth of his verdict.—" Nil tam absurdum, quod non dici potest ab aliquo philosophorum." I should have left it without comment, but for the importance of some of the topics on which it affords the opportunity for remark. To enlarge on all these topics would be to write a volume. I shall satisfy myself with a few very brief strictures.

And in the first place, the Reviewer sets out with imputing to me in very broad and unqualified terms a sentiment which, (however it may surprise him) I am so far from holding as true, that I regard it as subversive of some of the leading principles of the word of God:—" Dr. W." says he, " is prodigiously " in earnest to convince the world that *the scripture* " *attaches the greatest merit to faith*, and the greatest demerit to the want of it."—My maintaining the *merit of faith* as a doctrine of scripture, must be an inference of this writer from my maintaining the *sinfulness of unbelief*. But the inference is hasty. In the scripture statements regarding the way of salvation, (which it is the chief end of revelation to make known), there is nothing to be found either of the merit of faith or the merit of works. It is a scheme from which every idea of merit is entirely and peremptorily excluded. And it might easily be shown that this proceeds on grounds the simplest and most philosophical. It is a scheme which assumes man to be a transgressor, under the condemnatory sentence of a law which he has violated; and it would be miserably inconsistent with itself, if it held out to a creature so circumstanced any thing of the nature of

merit in the means of his deliverance. That creature is, on the contrary, taught (as, on every principle of the plainest common sense, he ought to be) that for that deliverance he must be a debtor to the free clemency of his justly offended Maker; that he must come for it, stript of every vestige of self-recommendation,—of every claim of right, every plea of desert,—and give himself up to mercy, on the ground of another's mediation. If there be any thing of which I should be "prodigiously in earnest to convince the world," it is this; for this, in as far as the acceptance of a sinner with his God is concerned, is the great fundamental article of Divine truth,—the first principle of the philosophy of the Bible,—to relinquish which is to give up the whole.—It is by no means a necessary sequence, that because there is *sin in unbelief* there is *merit in faith*. The sin that is imputed to unbelief lies in the moral causes from which it arises; and I admit that this I have been in earnest to show,—it being the leading object of the second discourse to demonstrate that in every instance the unbelief of the gospel has its origin in evil. But when I am represented as labouring hard to make it out that "the scripture attaches the *greatest merit* to faith," a most essential feature of my statements, which I believe to be those of the Divine word, is overlooked: namely, that one sinner's believing the gospel, while another rejects it, arises, not from any previously better or more virtuous predisposition in the former than in the latter in favour of its prescriptions, but from the influence of the Spirit of God, opening his mind to a spiritual perception of its excellence and evidence, and subduing the hostility of his heart against it. This sets aside at once every idea of *merit*. I am aware that human philosophy frowns indignantly on such a re-

presentation: and it is in connexion with the *pride of wisdom*, as one of the causes of aversion to the gospel, that I have in the former discourses particularly introduced it. But I cannot on this account flinch from or modify it. It is the representation of the word of God. It is truth. And therefore it is philosophy. The entire exclusion of all merit, and of all ground of personal boasting, is one of the leading principles on which the constitution of the gospel is framed.—I shall have occasion to touch again on this topic immediately.

Secondly: There is in the above extract an exemplification of a mode of dealing with Scripture, which is not a little imposing, but very mischievous. It is imposing, because it wears the appearance of a compliment to the sacred volume; it is mischievous, because its tendency is to preclude direct appeal to its authority. It is, however, far from uncommon, especially with that class of religionists, who arrogate to themselves the title of *rational*. It is the method, of predetermining in our own minds what reason teaches, as true or as absurd, and drawing our conclusion, previously to any reference to the actual contents of the Bible, what these contents either *must* be or *cannot* be. The Reviewer having represented me as "prodigiously in earnest" to establish a particular view as the doctrine of the scriptures, adds: "We know not that so much effort on that subject was "necessary, but, be that as it may, this at least is cer- "tain, that the scripture can inculcate nothing that is "absurd in point of reason or mischievous in point of "morality." After laying down this position, which must be admitted as incontrovertible by all who acknowledge the scriptures to be God's word, he assumes the sentiment which he had impugned to be the sentiment

which I had maintained, and on the ground of its obvious contrariety to reason and sound morality, he, without more ado, jumps to the *a priori* conclusion, that it *cannot* be taught in the scriptures. He reckons inquiry, in such circumstances, a waste of time and pains:—"Be that as it may"—"we have seen"—"we have seen"—and "the consequence is inevitable." Now, the fair and reasonable mode of procedure would have been, to go directly to the sacred volume itself, with the simple inquiry "What is written?" He should have laid hold of those portions of it, which I had adduced as proofs that *unbelief* is there regarded as *a sin* inferring *guilt* and exposure to punishment;—and should have shown that these portions are susceptible of a simple and consistent explanation, in harmony with his theory about the meaning of the term *faith* as used by the inspired penmen. He should have shown, by a plain and straight-forward interpretation, that in such passages *unbelief* or *not believing*, does not signify the *non-reception* of the testimony of the gospel, nor *faith* its *reception*;—that both terms refer to the examination of evidence, and that there might be unbelief where the testimony was received, and faith where it was rejected; and that it is not at all with the acceptance of their testimony that Christ and his apostles connect life, or with the refusal of it death.—To have attempted this, would have been something to his purpose; and it would have been, at any rate, the true way to evince his regard to sacred authority.—But the theory itself to which I have just alluded, claims a separate notice. Let us see it.—

Thirdly:—The Reviewer's interpretation of Bible phraseology, to which he avows himself shut up as the "inevitable consequence" of his assumed principles, is such as, if admitted, would destroy utterly the definite-

ness of all Divine communications, and shut up the Book in unintelligible obscurity.—" We have seen," he says, " that it would be absurd in point of reason, and mis- " chievous in point of morality, to ascribe merit or de- " merit to belief. We have seen, that it is most true in " point of reason, and sound in point of morality, to " ascribe merit and demerit, even the highest, to the pro- " per and improper modes of dealing with evidence. *The* " *consequence is inevitable. It is not belief which is* " *called in scripture faith; but the proper mode of dealing* " *with evidence.*"

" It is *not belief* that is called in the scripture *faith!*" Now, why attempt, by such a mode of phraseology, to blind the eyes of superficial thinkers? Why not say at once, " it is not *belief* that is called in the scripture *belief?* The term *belief*, this critic must be aware, is employed by our translators in rendering the original word, as well as *faith*. It had been well, perhaps, if it had been so rendered more frequently. By thus identifying it with *faith*, the mystical illusions sometimes associated with the latter term might in part have been dissipated. The corresponding verb *to believe*, however, is incessant in its occurrence.—Now, I must be allowed to insist upon it, as a principle of the very last importance for the right interpretation of the scriptures, that those who were employed in conveying the mind of God to men, *used words in their established and ordinary acceptation.* They surely *meant to be understood.* But understood they could not be, if, in their preaching and in their writings, they employed terms in a sense of their own, materially different from that in common currency. The assumption so unhappily prevalent that there is a peculiar meaning,—a sacred, *isoteric* import,—in the terms of holy writ, has given origin and sanction to the

wildest extravagancies of mysticism.—In the present instance, not only were the people to whom the publishers of Divine truth addressed themselves, whether in speech or in writing, accustomed to associate a fixed and simple conception with the term, when they were called to *believe* the testimony delivered to them;—but the same speakers and writers employed the same and its cognate terms on various other subjects, as well as with reference to the gospel. The word *believe* was in common use with them. On what reasonable principle, then, are they to be conceived to have attached a different meaning to it when it related to *divine* truths, from that which it bore when applied to *common* truths? In that case a sacred glossary would have been requisite. But no such glossary was given; and the reason is, that no one, in those days of simplicity, felt any occasion for it. Terms were used, which all understood. The question, What do you mean by *believing?* was a question which probably never suggested itself to a single mind. The *testimony*, and the *evidence of its truth*, were the points of inquiry.—The Reviewer conceives his conclusion about the meaning of *faith* to be rendered "inevitable" by the self-evident positions, which constitute the premises whence it is deduced. But the truth is, there is no puzzle in the case. There is not the least necessity, such as he fancies, for a change in the meaning of so simple a term. Only admit that *faith*, or *belief*, (for I must insist on their being the same,) when considered as the subject of moral responsibility, *is connected with the state of the mind and affections by which it is influenced*,—and the difficulty vanishes. This it was a leading object of the Two Sermons to establish.—But

Fourthly: Another curious proposition in this writer's extraordinary theory of faith, is expressed in this sen-

tence :—" *Faith, in short, has nothing to do with creeds.*" This is indeed a notable discovery. Is this writer not aware, that in numberless instances, where faith is connected with the enjoyment of forgiveness and of life, it is *the faith of certain propositions or truths*, which are distinctly specified in the very same sentence? I scarcely know what instances to select, they are so numerous.—John xx. 31. " Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples," (i. e. after his resurrection, and for certification of that all-important fact) " which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe *that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, and that, believing, *ye might have life* through his name." —John viii. 24. " If ye believe not *that I am he*, ye shall die in your sins."—Acts viii. 37. " If thou believest with all thine heart," (i. e. if thou sincerely and in earnest believest) " thou mayest. And he said, I believe *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*."—2 Thess. ii. 13. " God hath chosen you to salvation, through . . . . . belief *of the truth*."—1 John v. 10. " He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not *the record that God gave of his Son*. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."—It is not with the import of the propositions to be believed that we have at present to do: it is simply the connexion of the faith which brings salvation with *something believed*. In this respect, such passages, which might be indefinitely multiplied, are in direct opposition to the marvellous statement that " faith has nothing to do with creeds :"—a statement which is equivalent to this—that *belief* has nothing to do with *a thing believed!* —Now the philosophical truth of the matter is, that the *entire efficiency of faith*, in every view of it,

arises from *the nature of that which is believed.* I am well aware, that the term *faith* is frequently—much too frequently—used, as if it denoted some *abstract principle*, and that too of a very occult and mystical nature,—and that it conveys this impression to many minds, and keeps them groping in the dark, and harassed with perplexities. I know few things of more consequence, on this subject, than to hold forth the simple proposition that *faith can have no subsistence in any mind irrespectively of an object.* It is "the *belief of the truth*," 2 Thess. ii. 13. and *the truth* must be *present to the mind as the object of it*, else it is not, and cannot be, in exercise. Faith supposes an object believed, as much as love supposes an object loved.—And faith, whether represented as justifying, or as sanctifying, derives its virtue from the *nature of the truth believed.* The testimony of the gospel is fitted for both purposes. It is fitted for *justifying* the sinner, and giving him peace with God, because it reveals the righteousness and atonement of a Mediator, as the divinely sanctioned ground of pardon and acceptance: and it is fitted for *sanctifying* him, because it exhibits those views of God, that win the heart from enmity to love, and that contain in them the most persuasive and overpowering motives to holy imitation and devoted service.—It is a simple philosophical principle, that *any truth believed will produce effects corresponding to its nature and the circumstances of the person believing it.* In their representations of the influence of faith upon character, the scriptures proceed upon this rational principle,—a principle divested of all mysticism, and level to every capacity. They say, "Purifying their hearts *by faith;*" and they say, "Sanctify them *through thy truth;* thy word is truth."—It is *the truth* that sanctifies,—that exerts the rectifying influence upon the heart:—but it is of course

the truth *believed*. It is by faith that it is introduced into the mind, and comes into influential contact and incorporation with the affections and desires, operating upon them according to its characteristic nature and tendencies. This too is the view of the case given by Paul when he says, 1 Thess. ii. 13. "When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, *which effectually worketh* also *in you that believe*."—This is true philosophy, free from all perplexing mystery. *The truth* possesses a certain *moral fitness* for working a change on the human heart and character: and when it is understood and believed, this fitness is made apparent in the actual production of the change. But the strangely anomalous doctrine that separates "faith" from "creeds," —that makes it something (be that what it may) independent of an object, or independent of the truth or falsehood of its object, subverts this beautiful philosophical simplicity, and involves in utter confusion the whole of the Bible statements respecting the efficacy of that simple principle to which they ascribe so much.

I cannot but feel as if I had been almost mispending time in commenting on such opinions as those broached by the Reviewer, when I look at the following sentences, which occur immediately after describing the conduct of the man who deals *properly*, and of the man who deals *improperly*, with evidence, of whom, however, the former is supposed to arrive, unfortunately, but not by any fault of his, at a wrong conclusion, while the former, by chance rather than fair inquiry, happens to hold truth. "Notwithstanding this, the former is the man who has the "merit of dealing virtuously, the latter is the man who "has the demerit of dealing wickedly, with evidence. "Here the man who has the wrong opinion is the man

" who has faith, according to the scripture; the man who " has the right opinion is the man who, be the opinion " what it may, is destitute of faith. Faith, in short, has " nothing to do with creeds. Of two men, the one even " an atheist, the other a sound believer, it may be that " the atheist is the man who has faith according to the " scripture; that the sound believer is the man who is " destitute of faith according to the scripture; that the " atheist is possessed of all the merit, the sound believer " of all the demerit, which the scripture ascribes to the " possession or the want of that saving grace."

I find it exceedingly difficult, with the utmost stretch of charity, to believe a man in earnest who writes thus. Had he left out the words,—" *according to the scripture*," —it had been well. We should then have had his own speculation about faith, without any pretension to divine authority on its behalf. But that any man who has ever opened a Bible should have the effrontery to say, that " according to the scripture" a person may have the " saving grace" of " faith" " *be his opinions what they may*," however opposite to all that is " written in that book,"—that even an avowed " *atheist*" may be a scriptural *believer*, and, by consequence, " according to the scripture," justified by his faith, and sanctified by his faith,—loving and serving under its influence, the Being whose existence he denies,—and rejoicing in hope of a glory which he regards as the paradise of fools,"—and ———but there is no end to the absurdities of such a hypothesis. There is something so wild and extravagant about it,—so destitute of every thing approaching to verisimilitude,—that I should have thought it quite innoxious from its very grossness, had it not been actually extracted into Newspapers, with the seeming approbation of correspondents.—Most men, however, will find little difficulty

in perceiving, that the faith of which the scriptures speak is the *faith of what the scriptures testify;* and will be in very little danger from a theory which affirms the existence of saving faith where there is the extinction of all religious truth, (for there can be no religious truth where there is no God)—and which makes, not only the merit of faith, but the merit of the faith of an atheist, the ground of acceptance with God and admission to Heaven! Where was this writer's Bible, when such a theory was framed? It would, in my apprehension, be far more consistent for him to renounce scripture at once, than, under a professed appeal to its authority, to set aside its plainest and most peremptory statements;—to plead its sanction, for identifying, in their consequences, not *infidelity* merely, but even *atheism*, and the *faith of Christ;*—to represent the gospel as holding forth eternal life as the well-earned desert of the man who has meritoriously reasoned himself into the conviction that there is no God!—the due reward of the merit of an atheist!—Let this stand as the creed of the Westminster Review; but let the Bible be honestly given up by him who holds it.

In the heavy censure passed (in the close of the paragraph before quoted) upon "*the clergy*," as of all men the most deeply chargeable with the improper treatment of evidence,—and therefore of all men the greatest infidels, I presume it is intended that I should consider myself as involved. He repeats this censure again and again. "Let us first of all consider the nature "of that constant endeavour of theirs to confound the "attributes of belief with those of the behaviour to evi- "dence, to ascribe to mere belief the praise or blame "which can alone be due to the mode of dealing with "evidence." And again: "Not only do they attach a "merit and demerit to mere belief; they attach conse-

" quences of unspeakable importance to the holding or " not holding certain opinions,—the favour or disfavour " of Almighty God, and pain or pleasure infinite and " eternal."

If there be any to whom this charge comes home, they may defend themselves. But for my own part, the sentiment which connects eternal consequences with " mere belief," *in the sense in which the phrase is used by this writer*, I neither hold myself, nor do I know of any one who does hold it. That I do not hold it myself, this writer, as we have seen, both affirms and denies. For after having charged me with asserting it, he proceeds to show that my proofs are directed to the establishment of " a very different thing." He thinks, indeed, out of charity to my moral principles, that this was the effect of stupidity. But I do not think I am guilty of a breach of the apostolic precept, " not to think of myself more highly than I ought to think," when I say he is mistaken. I knew my ground; and proceeded on the principle, universally recognized in every thing else, that belief, considered as the subject of responsibility, is to be taken in connexion with the moral state of the dispositions, by which it is influenced. If any have thought, or spoken, or written otherwise (of which, however, I am not aware), I am not answerable for their inconsistencies. It is easy to produce a prejudice by the use of particular words: as when this Reviewer represents the clergy as connecting " eternal consequences," and the " favour or disfavour of Almighty God," with the " *holding or not holding certain opinions*." But if by this phrase he means the same thing with " *believing or not believing certain truths*,"—then, before renouncing this connection, we must renounce our Bibles. According to this writer, the supposition that the future prospects of men are to

be affected by the belief or disbelief of any thing whatever, is a self-interested device of the clergy,—one of the convenient bugbears of priestcraft. There is nothing,—if his theory be true,—nothing whatsoever, amongst all its contents, which the Bible requires a man to believe in order to his salvation. He may reject every iota of its testimony, and yet have the faith which it enjoins! He may be a determined unbeliever of all its communications, and yet not be an infidel! He may disclaim all connection with the Saviour whom the scriptures reveal, and yet be saved by a scriptural faith!—This is itself infidelity. It is too gross to be dangerous. Nor can any terms of disapprobation be too strong, for the unworthy sophistry, that would plead scripture authority for overturning scripture obligations.—The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him," John iii. 35, 36.—" He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day," John xii. 48.

THE END.

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